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今回の表紙は、
いつもどおりコピックにしました。
色々試してみましたが、
どれももっと勉強しなきゃなぁ。
楽しいなぁ。

勝木 光

Baby Steps

SHONEN MAGAZINE COMICS

Baby Steps
ベイビーステップ

勝木 光

24

KC

Baby Steps 24

勝木 光

講談社

SHONEN MAGAZINE COMICS

このゲームを取られたら栄一郎の負け・・・・!?

勝木光
Baby Steps
24
ベイビーステップ

ベイビーステップ

人物紹介

エーちゃん
丸尾栄一郎

STC所属。「今回の全日本ジュニアで優勝、そしてプロへ」が命題。そこで優勝できなければプロを諦めるという条件付きで、テニス最優先の生活を送っている。同じ夢を持つナツは心の支え。ナツとの交際がテニスに好影響!?

ナツ
鷹崎奈津

STC所属。全国トップレベルの選手でプロ志望。理論派・エーちゃんとは真逆の超感覚派で、それが互いの刺激に。ただいま恋もテニスも絶好調!!

佐々木梅子

エーちゃんの試合に必ず駆けつけてくれる心優しい応援団。梅子はエーちゃんへの想い実らず失恋。影山は親友。

影山小次郎

青井コーチ

STCでのエーちゃんのコーチ。元プロ選手という経験に裏付けされた指導でエーちゃんをサポート

清水亜希

コーチである青井と二人三脚でプロを目指す、ジュニア日本一の選手で、エーちゃんに片想いだが…

全日本ジュニア

各都道府県から勝ち上がった強豪64名が出場。優勝者には、日本のプロが総結集する全日本選手権の出場権が与えられる。

Baby Steps to Giant Strides

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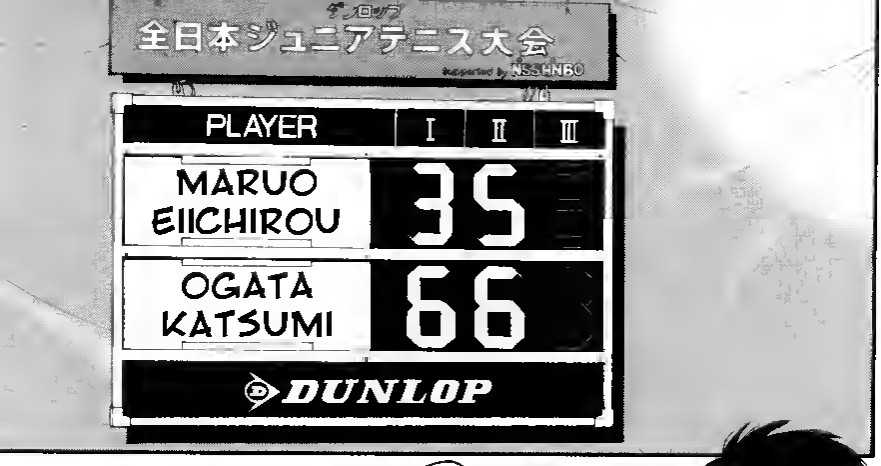

ダンロップ
全日本ジュニアテニス大会
supported by NSS HNBC
PLAYER
I
II
III
MARUO EIICHIROU
3 5
OGATA KATSUMI
6 6
DUNLOP

...
IF HE LOSES THIS GAME.
EIICHIROU WILL LOSE...
テニス

THIS IS IT, MARUO...
#222 SCRAMBLE

ALTHOUGH I SOMEHOW MANAGED TO KEEP MY SERVICE GAMES SO FAR, IT'S HARD TO SURVIVE THROUGH A TIEBREAK IF I'M RELYING ON AN UNSTABLE WEAPON LIKE THE JUMP SHOT.
THEN... HOW ABOUT PLAYING MORE INSTINCTIVELY LIKE NACCHAN AND TRUSTING MY INSTINCTS?
BUT I CAN'T THINK OF ANYTHING NEW ANYMORE...
THAT'S LIKE CONSCIOUSLY GETTING IN THE ZONE...
IT'S AN EXTREMELY DIFFICULT CHALLENGE THAT I HAVE YET TO SUCCEED...
トラになればいいの！
I WILL BECOME A TIGER, JUST LIKE RISA SAID...
CAREFULLY OBSERVE THE MOVEMENT OF MY PREY...

HE READ IT?!
ドッ
NO STOP TRYING TO USE MY HEAD AND ACT ACCORDING TO WHAT MY BODY TELLS ME TO...

WAIT... WHERE SHOULD I HIT?!
TRUST IN MY SENSES...
IT'S NO GOOD... TRUSTING MY SENSES ISN'T THE SAME AS NOT THINKING AT ALL...
RGH
CONCENTRATE AND FINISH HIM WITH...
IF I FIND AN OPEN-ING...
IT'S NOT THAT EASY TO PLAY LIKE NACCHAN!!

ONE BITE!!
0 - 15.

THANK YOU, RISA...
RISA ALWAYS SHOWS ME PATHS THAT I DON'T NOTICE...
I THINK IT'S A GOOD IDEA TO TRY BECOMING SOMETHING THAT HAS A FIGHTING SPIRIT...
I CAN'T STAY LIKE THIS... IF I DON'T DO SOMETHING, I'LL LOSE!
WHAT WAS THAT?! HIS SHOTS SUDDENLY GOT EVEN STRONGER...
AND I'VE GOT DATA TOO. I REMEMBER THAT SHE KEPT DOING COMPLETELY UNPREDICTABLE MOVES...
I PLAYED WITH HER...
WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I CAN'T BECOME LIKE NACCHAN...? CAN I AT LEAST MIMIC HER?
IF THAT HELPS TAKE OGATA-KUN BY SURPRISE, THEN THERE'S A CHANCE I CAN GET THROUGH THIS!
I WILL TRY STRATEGIES THAT I AVOID OR DON'T USUALLY THINK ABOUT...
NOT JUST NACCHAN, IDE-KUN AND IWASA-KUN TOO...
THINK BACK AS MUCH DATA AS POSSIBLE ABOUT INSTINCTIVE PLAYERS...

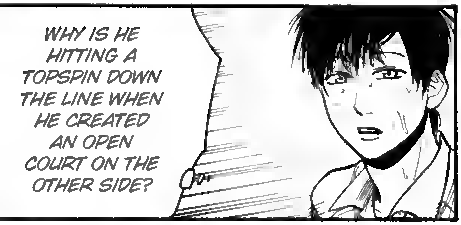
SHOOT... MY AGITATION IS PUTTING A LOT OF PRESSURE ON MY SERVE...
FAULT.
I ALMOST HAVE HIM COMPLETELY CORNERED...
...BUT BE CAUTIOUS AND THINK ABOUT MY PREY'S HABITS.
SFX: FWOO-
!?

SERVICE DASH WITH HIS SECOND SERVE?!
NET BALL... CHANCE!

15 - 15.
YES!!
THAT WAS COPYING NACCHAN...
IT WAS RISKY, BUT I SCORED!!
I WAS WATCHING HIM CLOSELY... BUT THAT WAS SO UNEXPECTED THAT MY HANDS DIDN'T MOVE THE WAY I WANTED.
THAT SURPRISED ME...
HA
THE WIDE, TWISTING TOPSPIN IS IN!!

NOW THAT I PUSHED HIMOUT OF THE COURT...
④ JUMP SHOT DOWN THE LINE
(CAN TAKE OGATA BY SURPRISE BUT IT'S DANGEROUS SO IT NEEDS A LOT OF POWER.)
③ FLAT CROSS
(COULD BE A WINNER, BUT OGATA MIGHT COUNTER IT.)
① A LONG, ANGULAR SLICE.
(YOU CAN PUSH THE OPPONENT OUT OF THE COURT AND IT BENEFITS FROM THE DIFFERENCE IN SPIN.)
② DROP SHOT
(IT WILL TAKE HIM BY SURPRISE, BUT VERY RISKY SHOT.)
USUALLY MY BEST PLAN IS ① BASED ON THE TRADEOFF BETWEEN RISK AND EFFECTIVE-NESS...
AND ②, ③, ④ HAVEN'T BEEN WORKING EITHER...
BUT THESE PLANS DON'T WORK ON OGATA-KUN.

THEN SOMETHING THAT'S NOT IN ① AND ④. HOW ABOUT A HIGH, ARCHING TOPSPIN DOWN THE LINE?!


WHY IS HE HITTING A TOPSPIN DOWN THE LINE WHEN HE CREATED AN OPEN COURT ON THE OTHER SIDE?

THIS IS CERTAINLY A NACCHAN-LIKE DECISION THAT I WOULD NEVER MAKE.

OKAY... CAN I USE A JUMP SHOT ON THIS?
IS IT TOO DEEP?
NO...

HE DIDN'T ATTACK... OR MAYBE HE COULDN'T?
ANYWAY, MY ADVANTAGE FROM THE SERVE IS STILL ALIVE

GO!!
IN!
OUT.
15 - 30.

FOR SHOTS LIKE THIS I'LL GO FOR THEM THE MOMENT THE THOUGHT ENTERS MY HEAD. THAT'S PROBABLY THE RIGHT SOLUTION!
IF IT WAS NACCHAN, SHE WOULD HAVE GONE FOR IT THE MOMENT SHE FELT "I WANNA HIT IT"...

SO CLOSE

SHOOT.. WHAT AM I DOING?! MY HESITATION MADE ME HOLD BACK A BIT.

BUT IT'S REALLY NERVE-WRACKING BECAUSE IT'S NOT MY STYLE OF TENNIS...
ドキ
ドキ
IT WAS ALL GOING WELL...
BUT... EVERYTHING BEFORE THE JUMP SHOT WASN'T TOO BAD.
SFX: BA-DUMP BA-DUMP BA-DUMP
WAS IT TOO EARLY TO LABEL HIM AS MY PREY? I SHOULD BE CAREFUL AND TREAT THIS LIKE A TERRITORIAL FIGHT WITH THE SAME SPECIES...
SOMETHING'S BEEN FEELING REALLY STRANGE FOR AWHILE
IT'S GOOD THAT I SCORED, BUT...
SFX: PWOO-
I SHOULD TRY ADDING MORE OF THESE SORT OF SHOTS INTO MY CHANGE-OF-PACE...
USING NACCHAN-LIKE ATTACKS ALONE PROBABLY WON'T BE EFFECTIVE IN THE LONG RUN, BUT...
IT LOOKS OKAY TO TRY IT OUT ONCE IN A WHILE...

TO DO THAT... FIRST, MY SERVE!!

Eiichirou's new challenge, "Unpredictable shots like Nacchan",
had the effect of confusing Ogata, who was trying to carefully observe Eiichirou's movements.
Moreover, it was a huge gain for Eiichirou to decide to "hit like Nacchan" when it came to jump shots.
The top-class fast shot and the unpredictable shot made for a surprisingly good match.

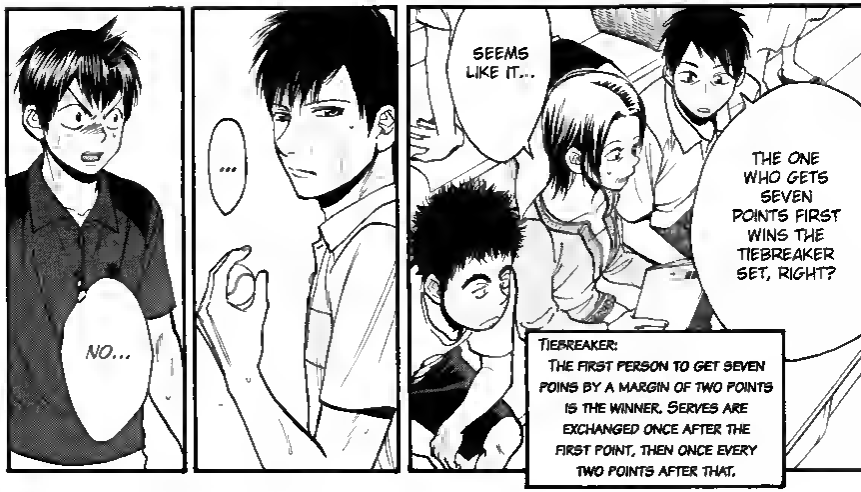
This leads to Eiichirou maintaining the advantage of his serves and trying all different ways to deliver the finishing blow.
As a result, Ogata has a harder time dealing with this new change-of-pace with larger variation in strength and attack patterns.
Unlike before, the game flowed in favor of the server as they normally would.

Although it may just be temporary, Eiichirou really started to catch up to Ogata in this Game 12.
VARIATION IN SPEED... UNPREDICTABLE ATTACK PATTERN... I COULD GET USED TO THEM IF I TAKE SOME TIME, BUT...
DAH

GAME, MARUO. 6 - 6.
TIEBREAK GAME.
YES!

HE CAUGHT UP!
GAME, MARUO. 6 - 6.
KEEP...
TIEBREAK GAME.
KEEP!!
YES!!
#223 MINI BREAK

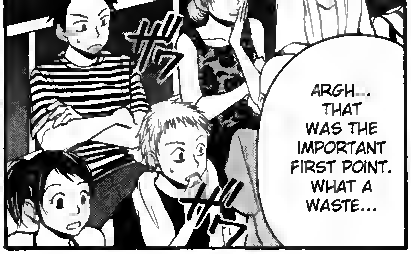
IF I CAN KEEP, THEN I CAN FIGHT THE TIEBREAKER ON EQUAL FOOTING.
IF I WIN THE TIEBREAKER... IT'S THE FINAL SET!
THIS KEEP IS DIFFERENT FROM BEFORE...
IT'S PROOF THAT MY "UNSTABLE JUMP SHOT" AND "NACCHAN-LIKE SHOT" ARE WORKING...
THAT'S WHY I WAS ABLE TO KEEP WITHOUT REPEATING DEUCES.

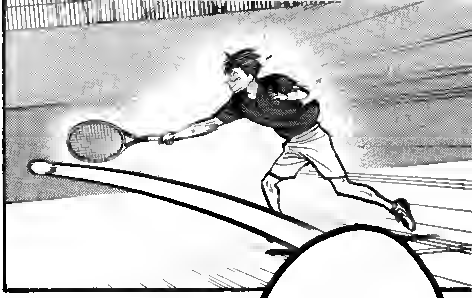

NO...
...
SEEMS LIKE IT...
THE ONE WHO GETS SEVEN POINTS FIRST WINS THE TIEBREAKER SET, RIGHT?
TIEBREAKER:
THE FIRST PERSON TO GET SEVEN POINS BY A MARGIN OF TWO POINTS IS THE WINNER. SERVES ARE EXCHANGED ONCE AFTER THE FIRST POINT, THEN ONCE EVERY TWO POINTS AFTER THAT.

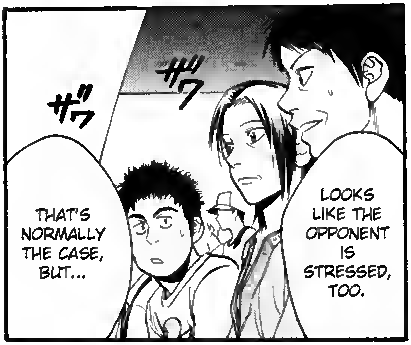
EVEN IF IT'S NOT FOR EVERY POINT, I NEED TOP-CLASS FIREPOWER...
IN ORDER TO WIN THIS MATCH... AND THE TWO MATCHES AFTER, I NEED TO HAVE A POWERFUL SHOT
EVEN IF I AM ON EQUAL FOOTING FOR THE TIEBREAKER, THAT WON'T LET ME BEAT OGATA-KUN...
I WON THE LAST GAME BECAUSE I MANAGED TO CONFUSE HIM...
THE KEY IS HOW WELL I CAN MASTER THE JUMP SHOT DURING THIS GAME.
AS I SURPRISE HIM WITH CHANGE-OF-PACE, I WILL USE THE JUMP SHOT AT CRITICAL MOMENTS.
NOT ONLY WAS I WAY OFF FROM A TIGER, I WAS TURNED INTO A CAT BY THE TIME I CAME TO MY SENSES...
I TRIED TO ATTACK AT THE RIGHT MOMENT LIKE A TIGER, BUT I WAS MORE LIKE A DISTRACTED CAT...
HE GOT ME.... HE ESCAPED OUT OF MY GRASP.

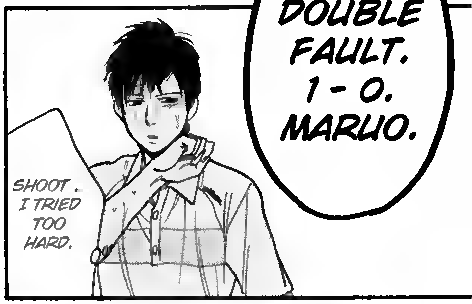
EVEN IF I WAS A CAT..
YOU RUNNING AROUND IN CIRCLES LIKE THAT...
MAKES ME WANT TO CATCH YOU...

FAULT.
ゴクッ
FASTEST ONE YET...
ドゴッ
ズバッ
!!

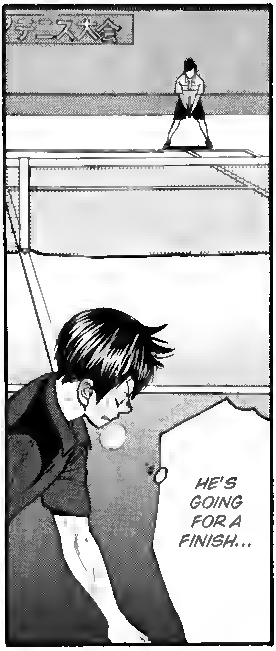

ARGH... THAT WAS THE IMPORTANT FIRST POINT. WHAT A WASTE...

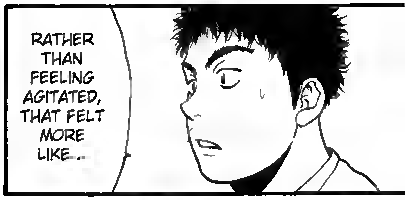



THAT'S NORMALLY THE CASE, BUT...
LOOKS LIKE THE OPPONENT IS STRESSED, TOO.


DOUBLE FAULT. 1 - 0. MARUO.
SHOOT. I TRIED TOO HARD.

THEN SOMETHING I HAVEN'T HIT YET...


テニス大会
HE'S GOING FOR A FINISH...


RATHER THAN FEELING AGITATED, THAT FELT MORE LIKE...

THAT WAS HIS MOST AGGRESSIVE SERVE YET.

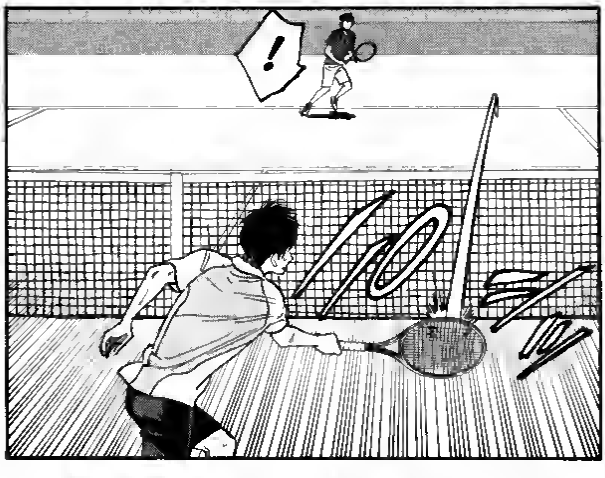
?!
A PURPOSELY SLOW SERVE TO OGATA-KUN'S STRONG FOREHAND.
1-1.

I GUESS HE GOT USED TO THEM?
IF I DON'T BE CAREFUL WITH THESE SHOTS IT JUST BECOMES AN EASY SHOT FOR HIM...
WHOA... HE GOT HIM.
HA
THOSE WEIRD SHOTS AREN'T A THREAT AS LONG AS I AM CAREFUL.
I WILL END THIS HERE...

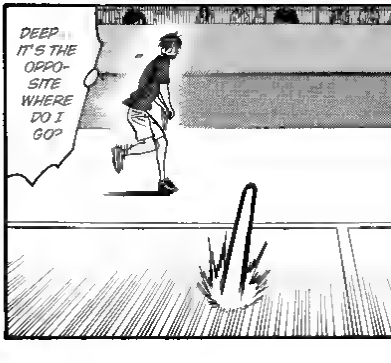
I CAN'T JUMP SHOT THIS...
STRONG RETURN...
RGH
RGH
HE'S MOVING UP...

I LOST TO THAT BEFORE WITH A DROP SHOT...

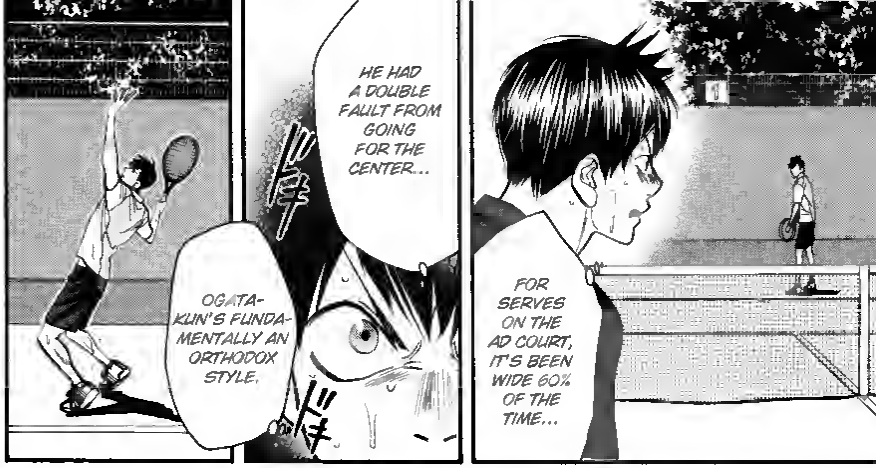
全日本ジュニアテニス大会
IT'S HEAVY...
BUT IT'S STILL SINKING...


!

JUST GO!

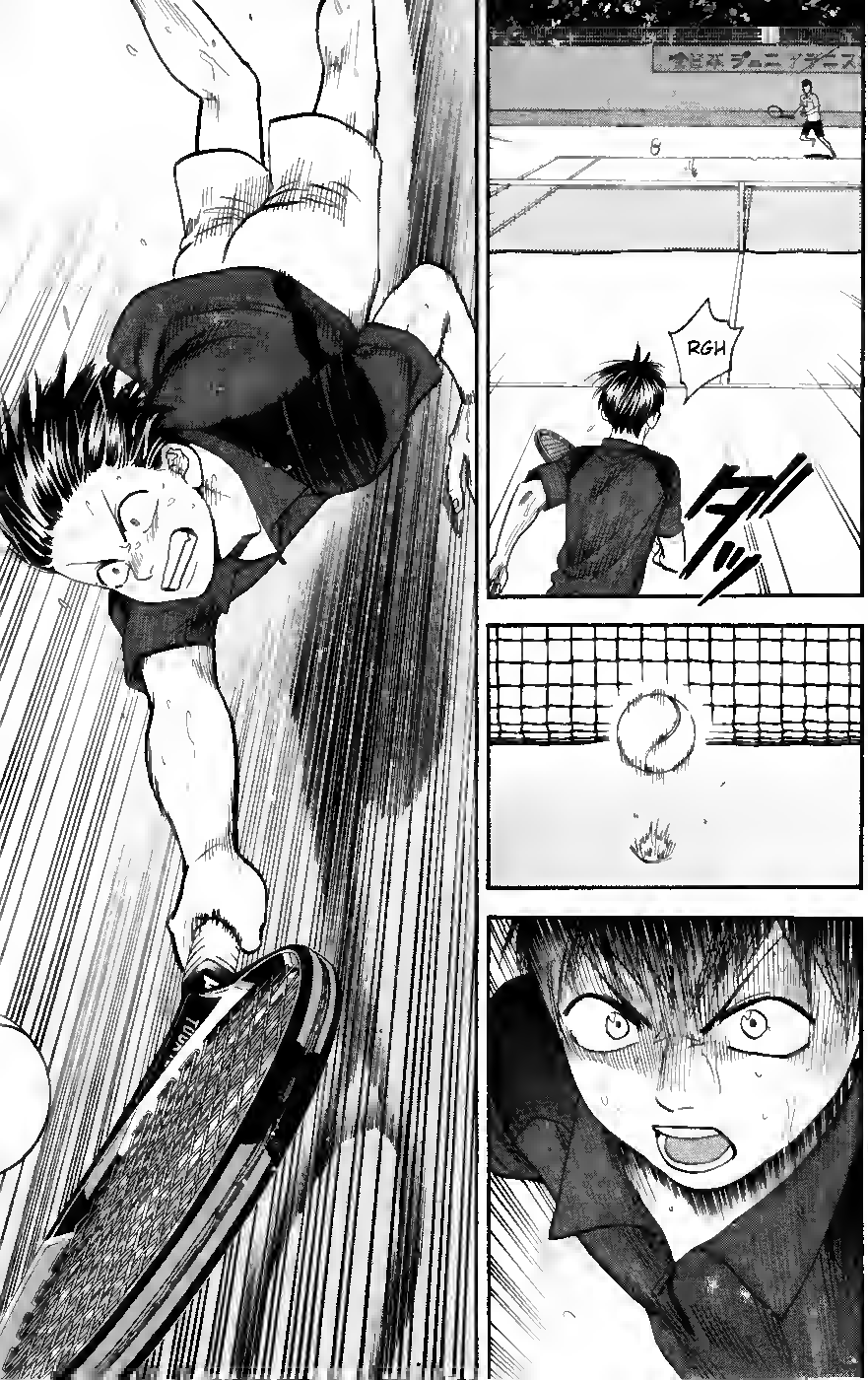

DEEP IT'S THE OPPO-SITE WHERE DO I GO?

2 - 1. OGATA.
YES!
I'M REACTING WELL TO HIS LITTLE MOVEMENTS...
I'M PUSHING HIM AGGRESSIVELY WITH A STRONG FIGHTING SPIRIT.
ARGH... HE GOT BOTH OF MY SERVES.
HE'S GETTING EVEN MORE AGGRESSIVE...
I REALLY WANT TO BREAK AT LEAST ONE OF HIS NEXT TWO SERVES...


FOR SERVES ON THE AD COURT, IT'S BEEN WIDE 60% OF THE TIME...
HE HAD A DOUBLE FAULT FROM GOING FOR THE CENTER...
OGATA-KUN'S FUNDAMENTALLY AN ORTHODOX STYLE.

ALL OR NOTHING...
I'LL BET ON WIDE!!

HA
HE GAMBLED ON IT...
IT'S GOING IN...
GO!


RGH

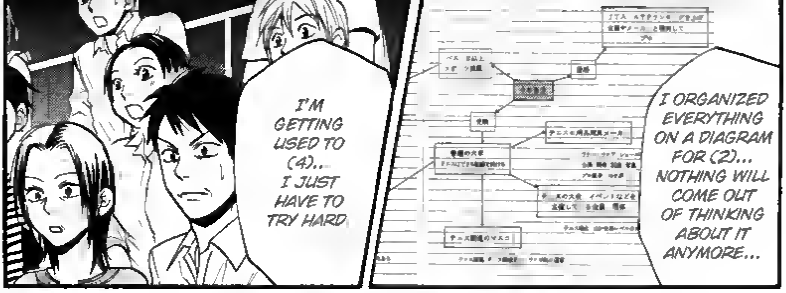
3 - 1.
ホッ
ハァハァ
AHH..
SO CLOSE!
THAT WAS DANGER-OUS...
ARGH
BUT I ALMOST HAD HIM IN MY RETURN... IT'S NOT BAD!!

RGH

IF I DON'T KEEP THE NEXT TWO SERVES, THEN I REALLY HAVE NO CHANCE OF WINNING...
W-WHY? HIS SHOTS ARE GETTING EVEN BETTER.
4 - 1. OGATA.
I CAN'T AFFORD TO MISS... IN THE WORST CASE, IT'LL BE OVER IN THE NEXT THREE POINTS
ドキ
ドキ
ドキ
...THEN I NEED TO SOMEHOW LEAD THE GAME TO A JUMP SHOT AND FINISH IT.
CONFUSION TACTICS ARE BEGINNING TO NOT WORK.
I WILL DEFI-NITELY WIN.
I WILL FINISH HIM HERE.
ドクン
ドクン
ドクン

HE'S PUSHING IN...
SECOND SET
6 - 6
TIEBREAKER,
OGATA - 4
MARUO - 1
#224 THINGS YOU BELIEVE IN
OGATA-KUN'S BECOME NOTICEABLY MORE AGGRESSIVE SINCE THE START OF THE TIEBREAKER.
HIS SHOTS ARE GETTING BETTER IN CRUCIAL MOMENTS.
IT WAS THE SAME FOR NABAE-KUN, ARAYA-KUN, OKADA-KUN, AND IDE-KUN...
MENTALLY STRONG THEY HAVE HIGH CONFIDENCE IN THEM-SELVES
ALL TOP-LEVEL PLAYERS IN THE NATIONALS ARE LIKE THIS...
ESPECIALLY WHEN IT'S A MOMENT THAT DECIDES WHETHER YOU WIN OR LOSE...

I'M NOT SURE ABOUT MYSELF, BUT I HAVE CONFIDENCE THAT I'VE DONE EVERYTHING I POSSIBLY CAN.
WHAT ABOUT ME...
IN ORDER TO HAVE THE BEST SPIRIT...
I HAVE TO FIRST CONTEXTUALIZE MY SOURCES OF STRESS...
(1) I CAN LOSE IN THREE POINTS...
(2) IF I LOSE, I CAN'T BE A PRO...
(3) I HAVE TO CONTINUE TRYING SOMETHING NEW
) IN FRONT PARENTS...
SINCE I'M LOSING IN BODY AND TALENT,
I CAN'T AFFORD TO LOSE IN SPIRIT!


I'M GETTING USED TO (4)... I JUST HAVE TO TRY HARD.
I ORGANIZED EVERYTHING ON A DIAGRAM FOR (2)... NOTHING WILL COME OUT OF THINKING ABOUT IT ANYMORE...

(1) IS SOMETHING THAT CAN'T BE HELPED. I SHOULDN'T WORRY ABOUT THIS...
IF I DON'T INCORPORATE (3) INTO MY BASIC TACTICS THEN THERE'S A HIGH CHANCE I WILL LOSE, SO IT'S BETTER TO DO IT.

THIS IS HOW... I GAIN CONFIDENCE!

IMAGINE ERASING ALL THESE FACTORS ABOUT 80%..

NO, IT'S A GOOD SERVE. IT WOULD'VE BEEN AN ACE IF IT WAS SLIGHTLY HIGHER
FAULT.
TCH
I WAS ABLE TO FEEL STRONG FOR THE FIRST SERVE...
ONCE MORE... LEAVE A LITTLE BIT OF STRESS AND ERASE THE REST...

I WON'T LOSE TO OGATA-KUN IN SPIRIT!!!
ENJOY THE THRILL OF EACH POINT.

DO PEOPLE NORMALLY DO THAT?
4 - 2. OGATA.
WHAT...?
YES!
T-THAT WAS REALLY DANGEROUS, BUT... IT BARELY MADE IT IN AND GOT AN ACE!
I WILL DEFINITELY KEEP ONE MORE SERVE!
THERE'S NO WAY I CAN WIN BY HITTING A DEFENSIVE SECOND SERVE AGAINST AN OPPONENT LIKE HIM!
I WAS ABLE TO BELIEVE IN MYSELF AND ATTACK IN THIS CRUCIAL MOMENT!
I WON THAT ONE WITH THE STRENGTH OF MY PASSION!
THE MORE I DRIVE HIM INTO A CORNER, THE STRONGER HE FIGHTS BACK..

THOSE EYES WON'T GIVE UP NO MATTER HOW MANY TIMES I TAKE HIM DOWN...

HE WOULD ENJOY MAKING RISKY MOVES EVEN AT TIMES LIKE THIS, AS IF HE WAS HAVING FUN...
ALTHOUGH THEIR STYLES AND APPEARANCES ARE DIFFERENT... THEY'RE ALIKE
HE'S SIMILAR TO IKE-KUN... EVEN THOUGH I DEFEATED HIM NUMEROUS TIMES,
HE ALWAYS MAINTAINED AN UNBELIE-VEABLY STRONG SPIRIT

BUT IF I WIN HERE...
IF I DON'T BEAT HIM, I'LL GET BEATEN...

I CAN DEFINITELY GO TO THE NEXT LEVEL!!
HE HIT IT OUTWARD!

HA
JUMP SHOT HERE!!

4 - 3. OGATA.
YES!!
HE CAN USE BRUTE FORCE, TOO.
THANK YOU GOD FOR LETTING ME FIGHT AN OPPONENT LIKE HIM...
GREAT!
AH, SO CLOSE!!!
I WANT TO GET AT LEAST ONE POINT FROM OGATA-KUN'S NEXT TO SERVES...
HE GETS A MATCH POINT IF I DON'T...

FROM HERE ON, IT'S ABOUT HOW MUCH I CAN BELIEVE IN MYSELF AGAINST OGATA-KUN'S INCREDIBLE SERVES
I WAS ABLE TO PLAY WITH CONFIDENCE DURING MY LAST TWO SERVES...
IF I DON'T READ HIS MOVES TO A CERTAIN DEGREE, I CAN'T TAKE THE LEAD
FIRST IS THE RETURN..
I AM FIGHTING WITH STRONG FIGHTING SPIRIT, WITH GREAT CAUTION..
I AM CONTROLLING MY SPIRIT PRETTY WELL, TOO...
I HAVE ALL THE DATA I GATHERED SO FAR IN MY HEAD.
MY EYES ARE GOOD, AND MY REFLEXES AREN'T BAD.

I SIMPLY HAVE TO DO WHAT I NEED TO DO... GOD WILL DECIDE THE OUTCOME.
WIDE!
NO, CENTER!!
JUST LIKE I'VE BEEN DOING UNTIL NOW, WHATEVER THE OUTCOME MAY BE
RGH

I WILL ACCEPT IT.
5 - 3. OGATA.
YES!
YES! NICE, KATSUMI!!

BELIEVE IN MYSELF.
IT'S ONLY GOOD IF I CAN AT LEAST RETURN ONE OF THE TWO!!
CRAP... NO, NOT YET!
BULLS-EYE!!

全国ジュニアテニス大会
ダッ
HE'S MOVING FORWARD WITHOUT WAITING FOR A JUMP SHOT?
FINISH IT! NO... HE'S GOING TO GET IT!
HA

うおおおお
OUT.
5 - 4.
OGATA.
YES!
PHEW...
WOW!
MARUO'S
CATCHING
UP!!!
GO! GO!
KATSUMI!!
ONLY TWO
MORE!!
MARUO!!
DON'T
LOSE!!

I GOT IT!!!
OUT. 5 - 4 OGATA.
ドゥ
I CAN DO THIS!!
YES!
IT WAS RISKY AND THERE ARE STILL MORE PROBLEMS TO SOLVE, BUT...
YES!
THE FACT THAT I GOT THE POINT MEANS THAT I WAS ABLE TO BELIEVE IN MYSELF!
YES!!
I THOUGHT HE WOULD USE A JUMP SHOT, BUT INSTEAD IT WAS A NET PLAY...
#225 WEATHER ADVANTAGE

I HAVE BEEN SPENDING MORE TIME IN TENNIS THAN ANYONE ELSE EVER HAD SINCE I WAS LITTLE.
I HAVE TO BELIEVE IN THAT AND WORK MY HARDEST...
I NEED TO OBSERVE HIM MORE CAREFULLY WHEN I ATTACK.
HE KEEPS ATTACKING IN WAYS I CAN'T IMAGINE...
WATCHING CAREFULLY AND ATTACKING QUICKLY MEANS RAISING MY OVERALL TENNIS SKILL
BUT WHEN I DO THAT, MY REACTION GETS SLOWER...
... AND FULLY ACCEPT THE OUT-COME!!
THIS IS A GAME-DECIDING MOMENT...
BUT IF I LOSE EVEN ONE POINT THEN IT'S HIS MATCH POINT...
I'LL MAKE A COME-BACK IF I KEEP BOTH. IT'LL BE MY SET POINT.
I HAVE THE NEXT TWO SERVES...

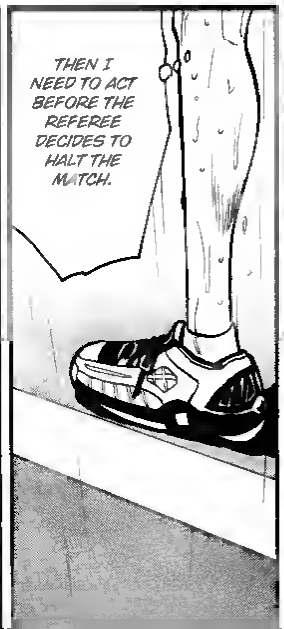
I GOT BOTH POINTS IN THE LAST SERVE.
IF I DO WHAT I CAN, I CAN GET THE POINT...
FIRST IS THE SERVE... USE THE JUMP SHOT AS THE BASIS FOR THROWING HIM OFF...
!
HMM?
RAIN ..?

WHOA, IT'S RAINING...
THE DROPS ARE PRETTY BIG...
IT BETTER NOT START POURING...

THE REFEREE ISN'T MAKING A MOVE...

AT A TIME LIKE THIS...

HAVE TO MAKE MY MOVE QUICKLY!


THEN I NEED TO ACT BEFORE THE REFEREE DECIDES TO HALT THE MATCH.

WHEN IT'S RAINING...
IT LARGELY FAVORS THE SERVER.
ON A HARD COURT, THE BALL SLIPS ON THE WET SURFACE AND BECOMES FASTER.

HA!
!
FAULT.
SHOOT I RUSHED TOO MUCH.
BUT MY BALL WAS DEFINITELY SLIPPING ON THE GROUND

5 - 5.
YES!!
WITH A SLICE THAT SLIDES...
ON THE SLIPPERY SURFACE....
...
I NEED TO ATTACK BEFORE THE MATCH IS HALTED.
LOOKING AT HOW IT SLIPPED JUST NOW, I CAN WIN EVEN WITH THE SECOND SERVE...
WIDE!

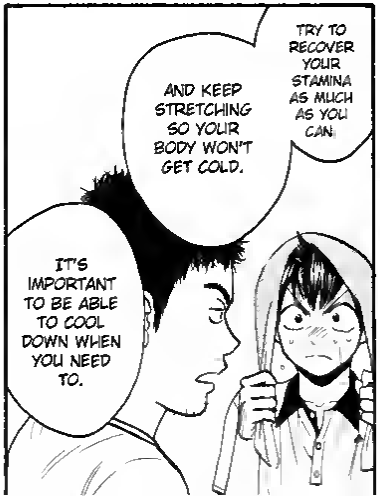
I'M SORRY. BUT I AM AFRAID OF GETTING INJURED FROM PLAYING IN THE RAIN.
YES! THIS IS GOOD!!
I'LL KEEP GOING AND GET THE SET POINT!!!
I'M USING THE WEATHER TO MY ADVANTAGE... I WILL USE ANYTHING THAT WILL HELP ME WIN!
WHA-
YOU'RE RIGHT. LET'S TAKE A TEM-
WE WILL TAKE A TEMPORARY BREAK DUE TO THE RAIN!!
IT STARTED POURING!!
THIS SUCKS

ALL-JAPAN
JUNIOR
PLAYERS
WAITING ROOM
ザワ
ザワ
ザワ

...
I WANTED TO GET AT LEAST ONE MORE POINT...
I WAS PRETTY FOCUSED...
THE LUCK AND FLOW OF THE GAME WERE BOTH STARTING TO MOVE IN MY FAVOR.

HEY YOU!
HEY!

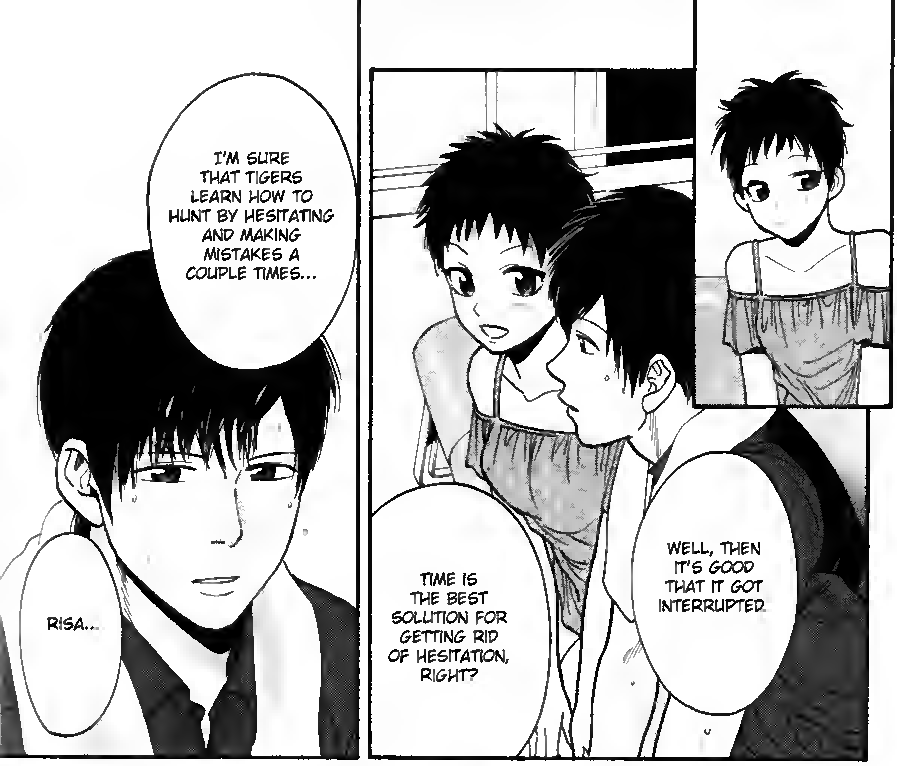
LOOKS LIKE IT'S NOT EASY FOR HIM TO COOL DOWN...
THIS IS THE FIRST TIME HE'S HAD SUCH AN INTERRUPTION...


TRY TO RECOVER YOUR STAMINA AS MUCH AS YOU CAN.
AND KEEP STRETCHING SO YOUR BODY WON'T GET COLD.
IT'S IMPORTANT TO BE ABLE TO COOL DOWN WHEN YOU NEED TO.

AOI-SAN...
ARE YOU PLANNING ON STAYING LIKE THAT FOR THE ENTIRE TIME WE'RE ON A BREAK?
WE DON'T EVEN KNOW HOW LONG IT'LL BE. YOU'LL GET EXHAUSTED...

Y-YES, SIR.
THINK OF THIS AS AN OPPORTUNITY.
IT'S NO DIFFERENT FOR OGATA.
EVEN PROS HAVE A DIFFICULT TIME GETTING BACK INTO THE GAME AFTER A BREAK.
HE HAD THAT MUCH OF A DRIVE
I MIGHT HAVE LOST THE SECOND SET IF WE HAD CONTINUED PLAYING ..
THAT WAS CLOSE...

TIGER?
YEAH.
I COULDN'T BECOME A TIGER...
ARE YOU FEELING OKAY?
HUH? WHAT'S WRONG, KATSUMI?
... BUT WHAT EXACTLY DO YOU WANT?
UMM .. I GET THAT THINGS AREN'T WORKING THE WAY YOU WANT..
DID I TELL HIM TO BE A TIGER?
I NEED TO REACT MORE QUICKLY...
IT'S IMPORTANT TO HAVE FIGHTING SPIRIT,
BUT THAT ISN'T ENOUGH...
RAIN CAN DISRUPT YOUR CONCENTRATION BUT IT'S GOOD FOR THE SERVER .. HE MADE A POINT WHEN I COULDN'T MAKE UP A DECISION.
WHEN IT STARTED RAINING, TOO. I SHOULD HAVE ASKED FOR A BREAK WHEN IT WAS STILL 5 - 4.
I WANT TO ERASE MY HESITATION.
EVEN WHEN I HAVE THE SPIRIT, MARUO-KUN'S TACTICS KEEP GIVING ME DOUBTS.
I SHOULD HAVE ACTED RIGHT AWAY

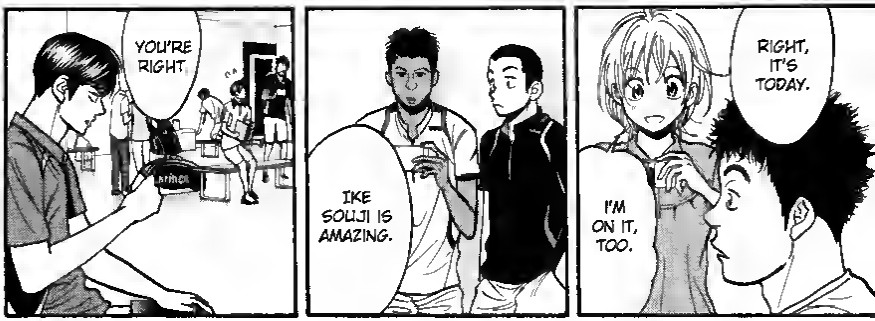

I'M SURE THAT TIGERS LEARN HOW TO HUNT BY HESITATING AND MAKING MISTAKES A COUPLE TIMES...
RISA...
TIME IS THE BEST SOLUTION FOR GETTING RID OF HESITATION, RIGHT?
WELL, THEN IT'S GOOD THAT IT GOT INTERRUPTED.

ARE THEY GOING TO CALL IT OFF FOR TODAY?
BASED ON THE WEATHER FORECAST, IT'S SUPPOSED TO ONLY BE A SHORT SHOWER...

EI-CHAN'S FOCUSING ON HIS NOTES.
HE WANTS TO ORGANIZE HIS DATA USING THIS TIME.
YOU NEED TO CONDITION YOURSELF, TOO.
Campus
IT'S BEEN AN HOUR ALREADY...
HOW LONG WILL WE NEED TO WAIT?
I WOULDN'T RECOMMEND SOAP OPERAS. YOU WON'T BE ABLE TO CONCENTRATE BECAUSE OF THE CLIFFHANGERS
I WON'T GET THAT SERIOUS.
MMM.. I WAS WONDER WHAT'S ON
HEY, OGATA~ WHAT'RE YOU WATCHING? TV?

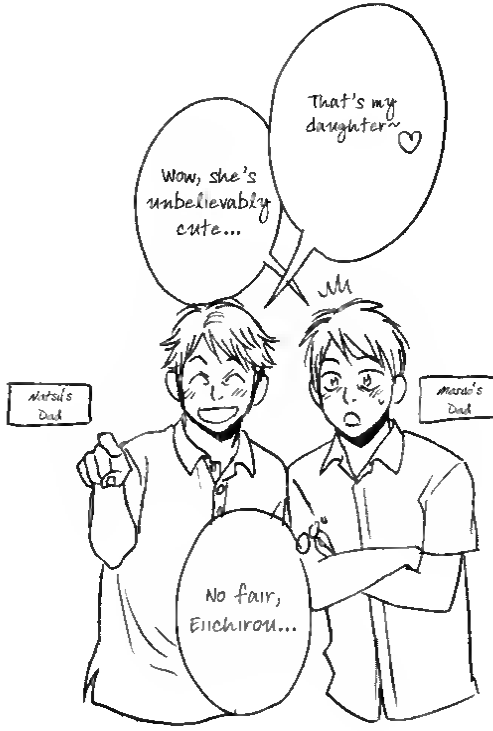
!?
YOU'RE ON TV!
WHAT?!
HEY, MARUO!!
ARAYA-KUN?
?
U.S. Open pre-open special!
SEE?
Ike Souji
Aiming to be in the top 25 within 5 years.

AH... THIS IS FROM THE TIME I PLAYED HIM AWHILE AGO...
WAIT A SECOND, EIICHIROU! WHY DIDN'T YOU TELL ME THIS?
We would've missed it!
NO WORRIES. I'VE BEEN RECORDING ALL SHOWS WITH THE KEYWORD "TENNIS".
GOOD JOB DEAR!


RIGHT, IT'S TODAY.
I'M ON IT, TOO.
IKE SOUJI IS AMAZING.
YOU'RE RIGHT.

IKE-KUN AND..
MARUO-KUN.
PAAM!

ブルブル
ブルブル
ブルブル


That's my daughter~♡
Wow, she's unbelievably cute...
Natsu's Dad
Masao's Dad
No fair, Eiichirou...

Baby Steps

His forehand stroke has gotten even stronger.
and has become a weapon that can make even the top players of the world stumble.

#226 SIMULATION

SOMEWHERE IN MY HEART I THOUGHT I WOULD EVENTUALLY END UP CATCHING UP TO IKE-KUN
IF I CONTINUED PLAYING TENNIS, BUT...
IT'S NOT THAT SIMPLE...
IT HELPED ME UNDERSTAND THAT EVEN BETTER BECAUSE MARUO-KUN IS IKE-KUN'S OPPONENT...
I DON'T HAVE TIME TO BE SAYING "EVENTUALLY"...
IF I DON'T MAKE IT HAPPEN IN THE NEXT FIVE... NO, THREE YEARS...
I MIGHT NEVER BE ABLE TO REACH HIM.
IF SO, I CAN'T AFFORD TO LOSE TO MARUO-KUN HERE.
THIS MIGHT BE THE FIRST TIME KATSUMI HAS BEEN SO DETERMINED...
ゴ!?

The weather has started to improve.
Therefore, we will resume the matches once the courts have been cleaned up.
!
...
パン
パン
パン

COURT NO. 1 WILL RESUME THE MATCH.
SECOND SET. 6 - 6.
TIEBREAK. 5 - 5.

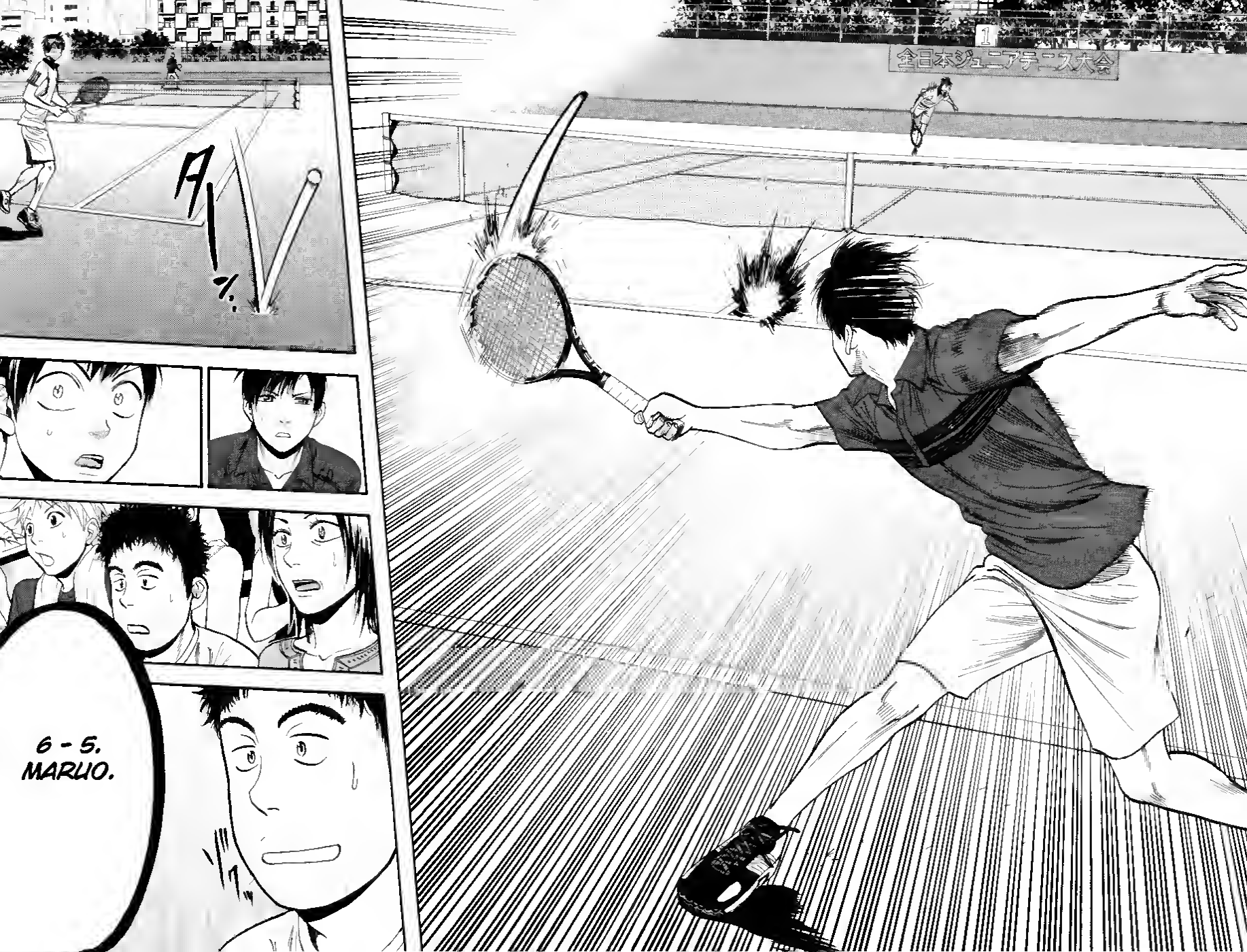
キュッ
キュッ
YUP.
IT'S STILL A BIT WET. BUT IT'S NOT TOO SLIPPERY
THIS SHOULD DRY PRETTY QUICKLY
...AN EXTREMELY IMPORTANT POINT IMMEDIATELY AFTER AN INTERRUPTION
IF I SCORE I GET THE SET POINT.
IF I LOSE THEN IT'S MATCH POINT.
ドクン
ドクン
...

20 MINUTES AGO.
IT'S ALMOST TIME. YOU NEED TO MAKE THE BEST OUT OF THIS BREAK.
YES... I WAS FRUSTRATED BY THE INTERRUPTION AT FIRST,
BUT I MANAGED TO GET PLENTY OF TIME. SO I THINK IT TURNED OUT TO BE A GOOD THING.
I WAS ABLE TO SIMULATE VARIOUS TACTICS AND RANK THEM IN ORDER OF PRIORITY.
I AM THINKING OF A FAST TOPSPIN TO THE CENTER FOR THE FIRST SERVE
HMM? YOU'VE ALREADY MADE UP YOUR MIND?
OH...

AND SINCE MY LAST POINT BEFORE THE BREAK WAS A SLIDER, A HIGH, BOUNCY SHOT SHOULD WORK WELL.
WHEN I LOOKED BACK AT THE PREVIOUS PLAYS THROUGH MY NOTES, THIS ATTACK HAD THE HIGHEST CHANCE OF SUCCESS
IT WOULD BE GREAT IF I CAN GET AN ACE, BUT AT THE VERY LEAST I WANT TO MAKE HIM USE HIS ONE-HANDED BACKHAND.
SINCE THE NEXT SHOTS THAT COME AFTER ARE MY OPPONENT'S SERVES, IF I LOSE THIS FIRST POINT I'LL BE REALLY DEVASTATED.
BUT,
OF COURSE, I SIMULATED WHAT WOULD HAPPEN IF IT FAILED OR THE POINTS AFTER.
I'LL...
THAT'S WHY I SPENT MY TIME COMING UP WITH A STRATEGY
THAT I WON'T REGRET.

ON THIS...
BET THIS ENTIRE MATCH

FIRST SERVE!!!


全日本ジュニアテニス大会
ｱｰ!.
6 - 5.
MARUO.

WHOA!! MARUO FINALLY TOOK THE LEAD!
IT'S MARUO'S SET POINT!!!
YES!

IT'S IN! I GOT IT!
PLAYING WITH MY STYLE...
I CLEARED THE MINIMUM REQUIREMENT FOR VICTORY!!

6 - 6.
WHOA! OGATA AVENGED WITH AN ACE!!!
WHAT AN AWESOME START!
THEY'RE BOTH NOT BACKING DOWN!
SO COOL!!!

IT'S HARD TO PLAY AGAINST AN OPPONENT'S SERVE... I KNOW I'LL BE AT A DISADVANTAGE.
THESE EXTREME SITUATIONS ARE DECIDED BY EXPERIENCE IN THE LONG TERM... I WILL PLAY MY BEST UNTIL THEN.
I NEED TO ACTIVELY COUNTER HIS ATTACKS AND EXPECT HIM TO BE AIMING FOR ANOTHER ACE.
BUT OGATA-KUN SEEMS MORE AGGRESSIVE THAN I EXPECTED..
WIDE!
アン

A SERVICE DASH!?
I'LL TRY TO SCORE WITH THIS!
IT'S COMPLETELY OUTSIDE MY SIMULATION.

シュ
IT'LL BE TO THE OPEN COURT!
HE CAN REACH IT...
ビシッ
7 - 6. OGATA.
AMAZING ANGLE... WHAT A TOUCH.

IT'S HERE!!! OGATA, TAKE THE MATCH POINT!
MARUO!!! IT'S NOT OVER YET!
HE'S STRONG... BUT HE'S NOT SOMEONE I SHOULD BE LOSING TO BEFORE I FACE IKE-KUN.
NOT YET... I HAVE SIMULATIONS FOR WHEN I'M UNDER A MATCH POINT.
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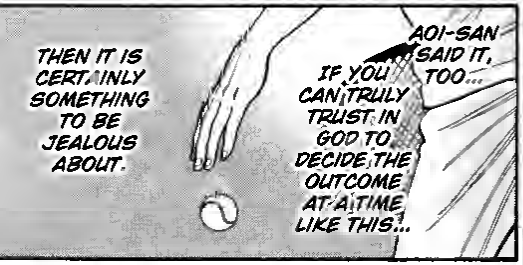
EVERYTHING MIGHT END WITH THIS BALL...
#227 MATCH POINT


THEN IT IS CERTAINLY SOMETHING TO BE JEALOUS ABOUT.
IF YOU CAN TRULY TRUST IN GOD TO DECIDE THE OUTCOME AT A TIME LIKE THIS...
AOI-SAN SAID IT, TOO...

IN THE DATA THAT I HAVE BEEN RELYING ON TILL NOW.
I WILL PUT ALL MY TRUST IN MY DATA.

MATCH POINT WITH MY FUTURE ON THE LINE...
いいなあ

I SIMULATED THIS MATCH POINT WHEN WE HAD THE BREAK BECAUSE OF THE RAIN...
I HAVE BEEN GETTING GOOD RESULTS WHEN I FOLLOWED MY SIMULATIONS SINCE WE RESUMED THE MATCH
IT WAS GOOD THAT I GOT TO WATCH THE MATCH BETWEEN IKE-KUN AND MARUO-KUN...
MY FIGHTING SPIRIT IS GIVING ME IDEAS ON HOW TO ATTACK...
?!

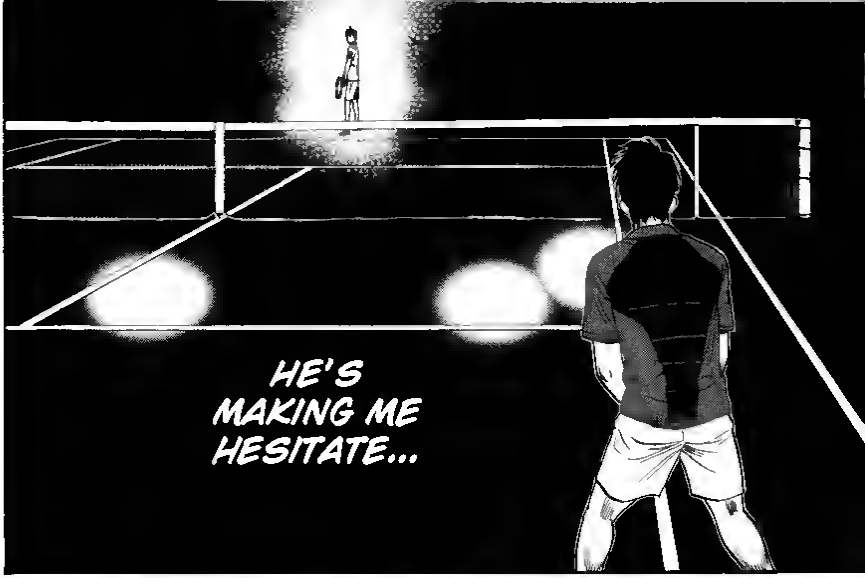
ス！
QUICK SERVE?!

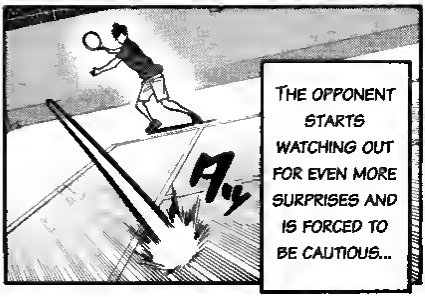
HE CAN DO THAT TOO?!
!!!

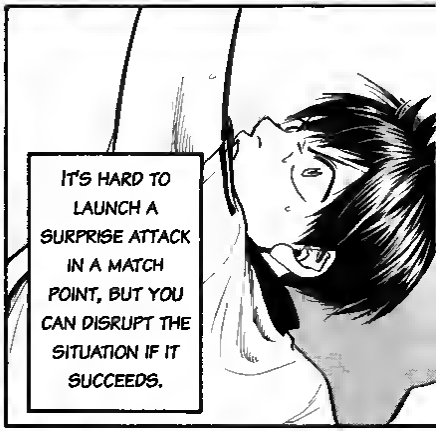
IF IT GETS EVEN A LITTLE WEAK, DON'T HESITATE...
JUMP SHOT!!

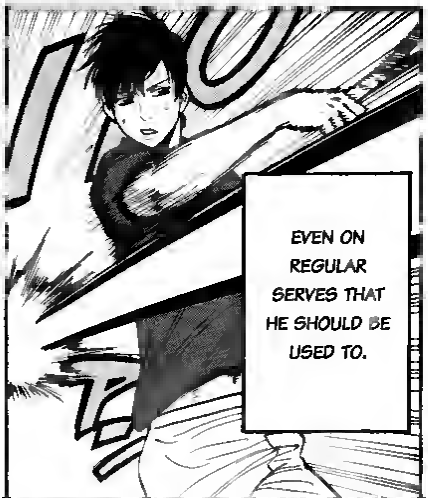
ふぅ。
7-7.
YES!

AWESOME!!! HE FOUGHT BACK WITH A WINNER!
phew
THAT WAS A QUICK SERVE?! HOW CAN HE DO THAT IN THIS SITUATION?
PEOPLE USUALLY GO WITH THEIR MOST CONFIDENT SHOT AT IMPORTANT MOMENTS...
MARUO-KUN DOESN'T HAVE A PARTICULAR SERVE THAT HE PREFERS... BUT A QUICK SERVE IS REALLY UNIMAGINABLE.
YES!!! I GOT IT!!!
THANK GOODNESS I RELIED ON MY DATA!!
I WAS ABLE TO PLAY WITHOUT HESITATION BECAUSE I HAD A SOLID PLAN!!!
THEN SHOULD I EXPECT HIM TO BE HIDING SOMETHING ELSE, TOO?
NOT AGAIN...


HE'S MAKING ME HESITATE...


THE OPPONENT STARTS WATCHING OUT FOR EVEN MORE SURPRISES AND IS FORCED TO BE CAUTIOUS...


IT'S HARD TO LAUNCH A SURPRISE ATTACK IN A MATCH POINT, BUT YOU CAN DISRUPT THE SITUATION IF IT SUCCEEDS.


EVEN ON REGULAR SERVES THAT HE SHOULD BE USED TO.

WIDE SLICE!!

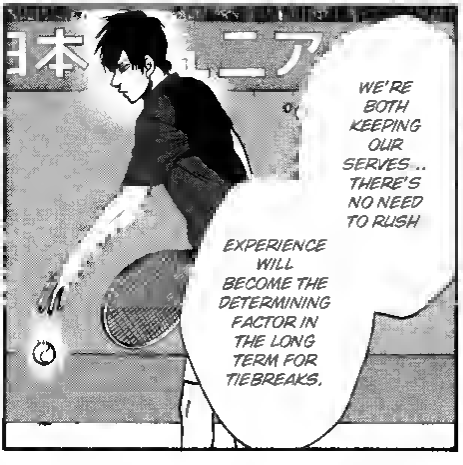
AND THE CROSS THAT CAPITALIZES ON THAT MOVEMENT BECOMES VERY EFFECTIVE.
THAT CAUSES OGATA TO RUSH BACK TO THE CENTER COURT IN ORDER TO MAKE UP FOR HIS DELAY.
HE CAN BARELY MAKE IT... THAT MEANS HIS ONLY OPTION IS DOWN THE LINE...
HIS SIMULATION THAT FOLLOWS THE SURPRISE ATTACK IN THE MATCH POINT...

WAS
INCREDIBLY
SUCCESSFUL.
...!!!
8 - 7.
MARUO.
IT'S
HERE!!!
YES!
MARUO
MADE A
COMEBACK.
IT'S HIS
SET POINT
NOW!!!

THE SERVES ARE GOING EXACTLY THE WAY I SIMULATED.
MAYBE THE FACT OGATA-KUN'S STYLE IS ORTHODOX HELPED THINGS GO WITHOUT ANY BIG SURPRISES.
BUT IT'S OGATA-KUN'S SERVE FROM HERE . DETAILED SIMULATIONS DON'T HELP MUCH WHEN THE OPPONENT IS LEADING THE GAME...

I'LL BE AT A DIS-ADVANTAGE IF THE GAME GOES ON LONGER...
I NEED TO RELY ON MY NOTES HERE...
TO FINISH IT HERE NOW...

SINCE HE CAN'T AFFORD TO LOSE THIS POINT, OGATA-KUN WILL MOST LIKELY CHOOSE THE SERVE THAT HAS BEEN THE MOST SUCCESSFUL SO FAR...


WE'RE BOTH KEEPING OUR SERVES.. THERE'S NO NEED TO RUSH
EXPERIENCE WILL BECOME THE DETERMINING FACTOR IN THE LONG TERM FOR TIEBREAKS.

BASED ON ALL THE SERVES THAT OGATA-KUN MANAGED TO SCORE, 76% OF THEM WERE WIDE...
Wide 19 of 25 76%
Middle 2 of 3 66%
Center 8 of 14 57%
EVERYONE WANTS TO RELY ON THEIR PAST SUCCESSES WHEN THEY'RE UNDER PRESSURE.
WIDE, WIDE, WIDE, WIDE, WIDE, WIDE, WIDE, WIDE, WIDE, COME ON... WIDE
WIDE!!!
I WAS WRONG!!!
BUT I CAN STILL REACH IT!

BUT THERE IS A SIMULATION I WANTED TO TRY AT A TIME LIKE THIS!!
IT'S WEAK... I'M COMPLETELY UNDER-POWERED.
110km/h

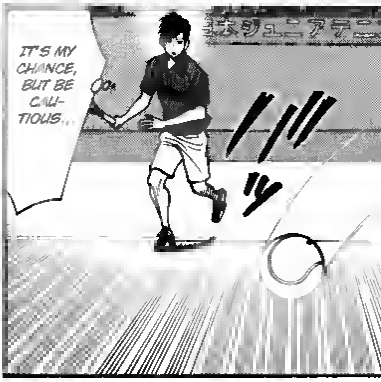
A DROP SHOT HERE?!

SHOOT, IT'S TOO LONG FOR A DROP SHOT!

HAH

AND I'LL JUMP TO WHICHEVER SIDE HE ENDS UP HITTING
I NEED TO REDUCE THE SPACE OGATA-KUN CAN HIT BY MOVING FORWARD AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE

I'LL RUN FORWARD ANYWAY!!!


IT'S MY CHANCE, BUT BE CAU-TIOUS..

MARUO-KUN IS BETTING ON HIS GREAT REFLEXES...
BUT I WON'T PLAY BY HIS GAME...

DOWN THE LINE.
WHAT?

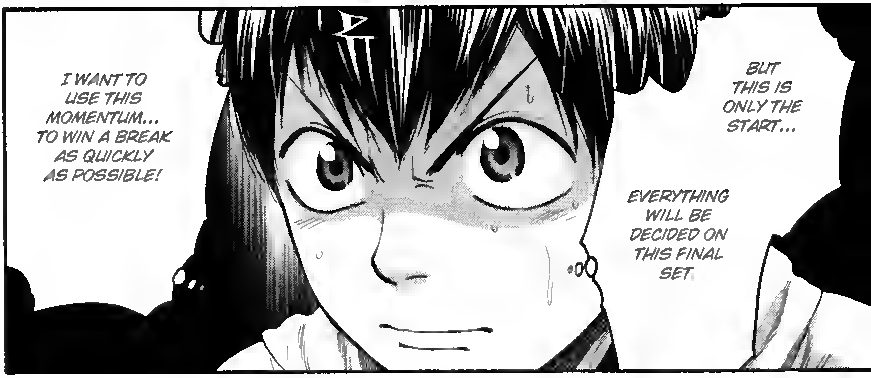
PLAYER
I
II
MARUO EIICHIROU
30
OGATA
66
SECOND SET WON BY MARUO.
COUNT: 7 - 6 (9 - 7)
FINAL SET.

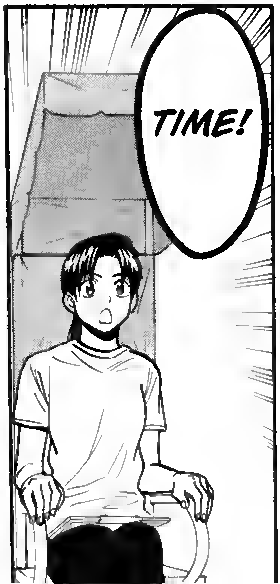
#228 FINAL SET

ふう…
... I DID IT.
I SURVIVED!!

FOR THAT LAST POINT, I THOUGHT THAT MARUO-KUN WOULD START MOVING TO ONE SIDE QUICKER, BUT...
HE KEPT WAITING UNTIL HE LEARNED EXACTLY WHICH SIDE I WAS AIMING FOR. IT SHOWS HOW CONFIDENT HE IS WITH HIS REFLEXES..
I WAS FORCED TO CREATE A FEINT IN THE OPPOSITE DIRECTION, AND THAT CAUSED ME TO MISS.
I TOOK MARUO-KUN'S REFLEXES TOO LIGHTLY...
THE MORE I PLAY, THE MORE I REALIZE HOW NAIVE I AM.
I SHOULDN'T HAVE BEEN THINKING "THE TIEBREAK WILL GO IN MY FAVOR IN THE LONG TERM."
MARUO-KUN'S PLAN OF ATTACK WENT THROUGH A CLEAR CHANGE EVER SINCE THE INTERRUPTION..
EVEN THOUGH I KNEW HOW WELL MARUO-KUN FOUGHT AGAINST IKE-KUN...

... BUT I'M SO GLAD IT ALL WENT WELL!
I THOUGHT I WAS GOING TO PASS OUT!
THANK GOD ..

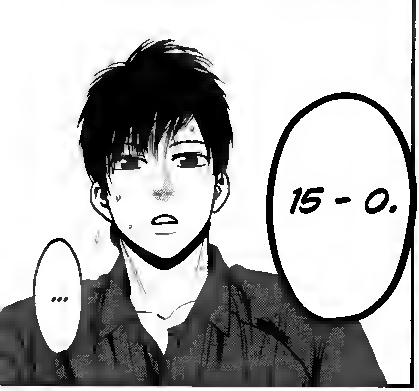

I WANT TO USE THIS MOMENTUM... TO WIN A BREAK AS QUICKLY AS POSSIBLE!
BUT THIS IS ONLY THE START...
EVERYTHING WILL BE DECIDED ON THIS FINAL SET.

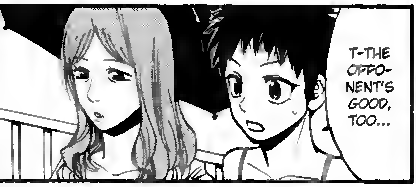

TIME!

I WONDER WHAT HE'S WRITING SO FURIOUSLY...
MARUO'S AN INTER-ESTING GUY...
THAT WAS A NICE GAME. MOST PEOPLE WOULD'VE JUST GIVEN UP AT ONE POINT...

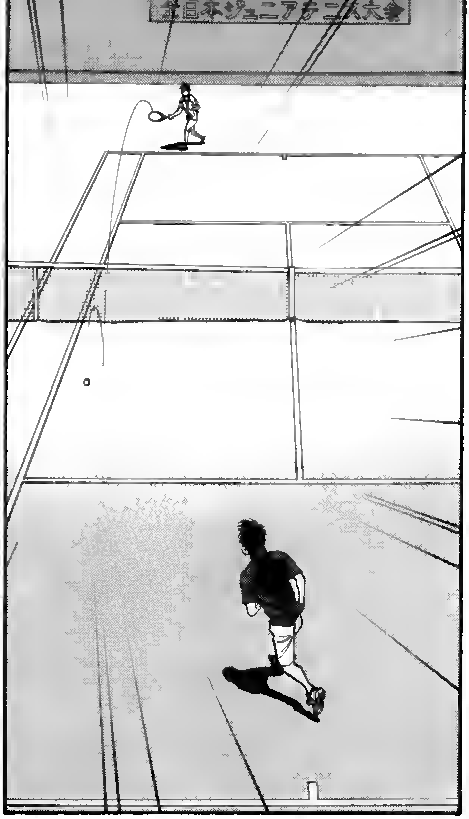
FINAL SET.
THE ACCURACY OF MY FIRST SERVE NEEDS TO BE BETTER THAN THE SECOND SET BY 72% NO MATTER WHAT...
MY OPPONENT IS OGATA-KUN. I NEED SERVES THAT EXCEED WHAT I USED IN THE SECOND SET.
HH—!

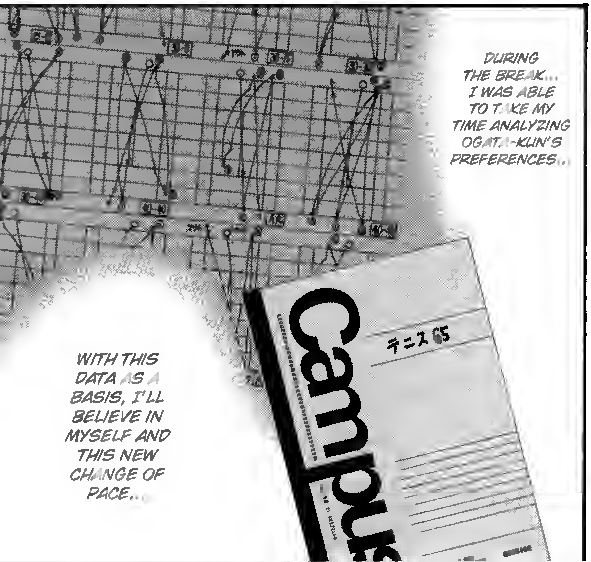
...AND MY GOAL IS THE TACTIC THAT WON ME POINTS RIGHT BEFORE THE INTERRUPTION
WITHIN MY CHANGE OF PACE...
MAKE JUMP SHOTS MY PRIMARY WEAPON WHILE MIXING IN SOME IRREGULAR SHOTS...
GO FOR A FINISH WHILE I STILL HAVE THE ADVANTAGE...


15 - 0.
...


T-THE OPPONENT'S GOOD, TOO...

HEY, HEY... SOMEONE'S GOING PRETTY AGGRESSIVE FROM THE START...

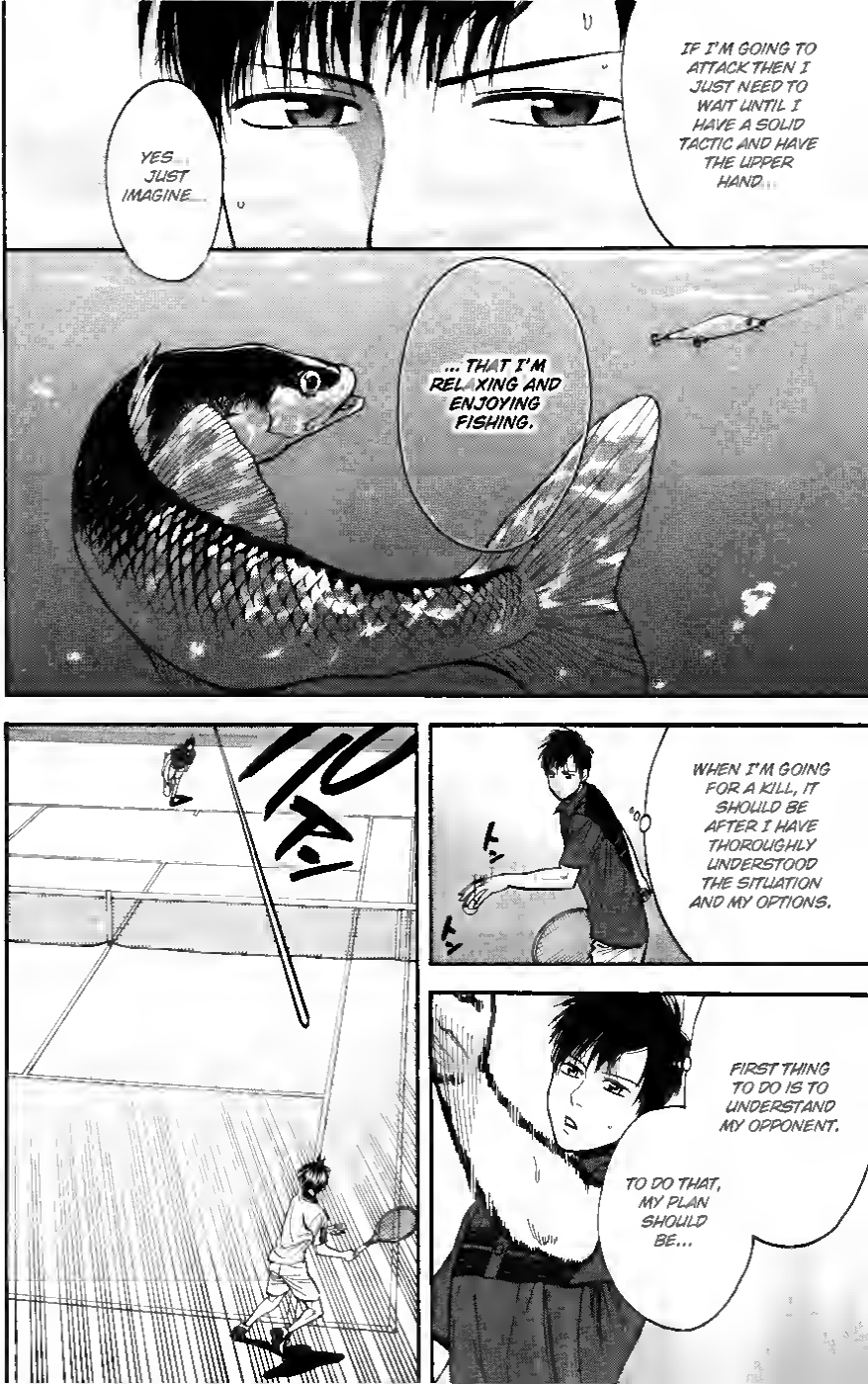



DURING THE BREAK... I WAS ABLE TO TAKE MY TIME ANALYZING OGATA-KUN'S PREFERENCES..
WITH THIS DATA AS A BASIS, I'LL BELIEVE IN MYSELF AND THIS NEW CHANGE OF PACE..
テニス 05

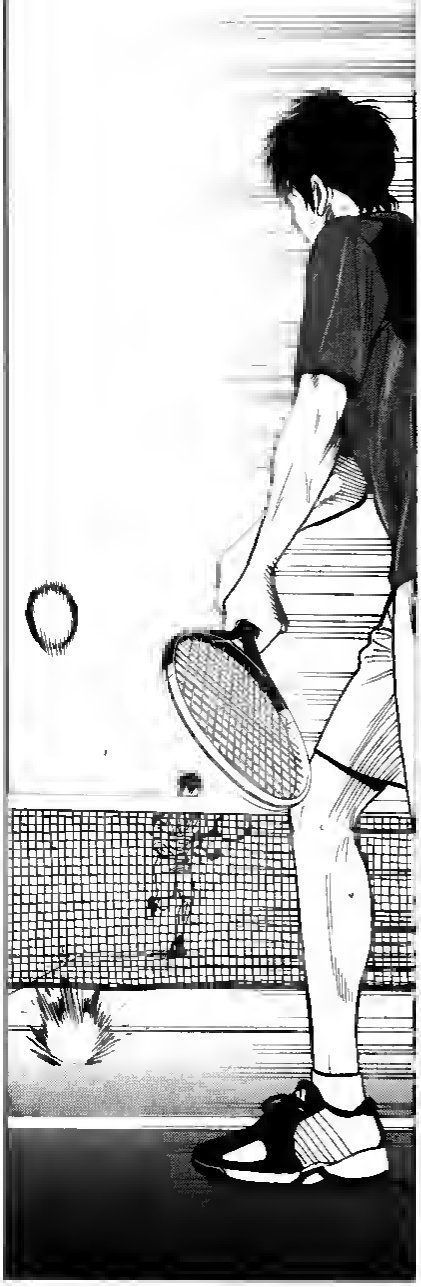
TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THIS MOMENTUM. BE AGGRESSIVE FROM THE START.

... TO ATTACK!!
HA
RGH

NOT GOOD.. I NEED TO CONCENTRATE ON DEFEATING MARUO-KUN HIMSELF.
I KEEP OVERLAPPING HIM WITH IKE-KUN.
GAME, MARUO. 1 - 0. FINAL SET.
YES!!!
THERE ARE SOME PLACES WHERE MARUO-KUN AND IKE-KUN ARE ALIKE, BUT THEIR STYLES ARE COMPLETELY DIFFERENT.
SINCE HE PUTS MORE EMPHASIS ON DEFENSE THAN IKE-KUN, IT'S DANGEROUS TO ATTACK HIM CARELESSLY


IF I'M GOING TO ATTACK THEN I JUST NEED TO WAIT UNTIL I HAVE A SOLID TACTIC AND HAVE THE UPPER HAND...
YES JUST IMAGINE...
... THAT I'M RELAXING AND ENJOYING FISHING.
WHEN I'M GOING FOR A KILL, IT SHOULD BE AFTER I HAVE THOROUGHLY UNDERSTOOD THE SITUATION AND MY OPTIONS.
トン
トン
FIRST THING TO DO IS TO UNDERSTAND MY OPPONENT.
TO DO THAT, MY PLAN SHOULD BE...

IT'S SLOWER, BUT MORE ACCURATE.
全日本ジュニアテニス大会
THIS DEPTH, THIS AIM, THIS SPEED
IT'S MEDIOCRE COMPARED TO BEFORE THEN
IT'S A "GO"!!!



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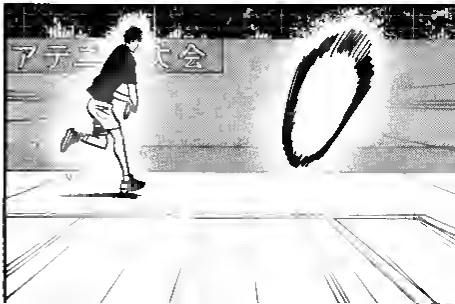
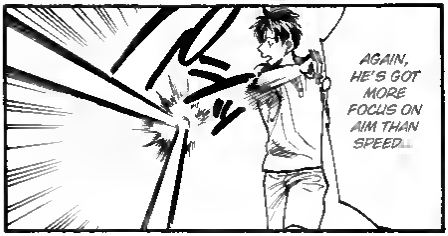
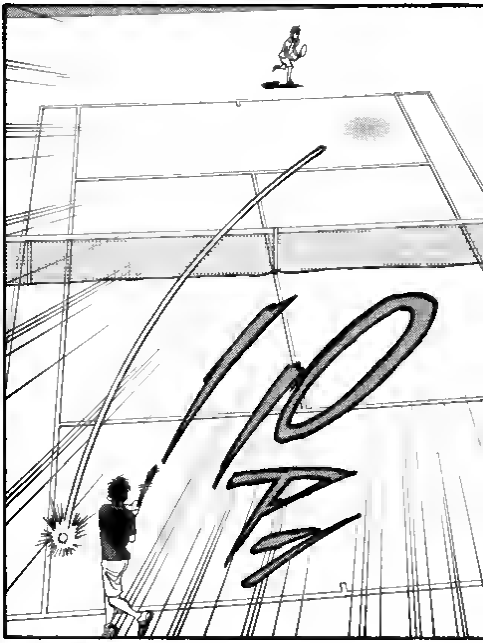


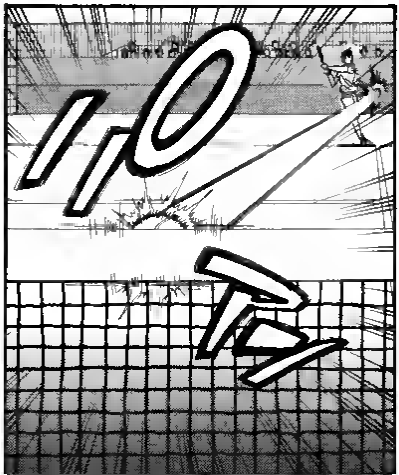
15 - 0.
HE READ MY MOVE?!
THE TIMING WAS DIFFERENT, TOO...
IT TAKES A LOT OF WORK TO WAIT FOR MARUO-KUN'S MISS SINCE HE HAS HIGH DEFENSIVE SKILLS.
YUP... THIS FEELS RIGHT.
AND STRIKE WHEN HE IS THE MOST DEFENSIVELESS.
SO USE A BAIT TO FIGURE OUT MY OPPONENT'S THOUGHTS AND THRESHOLDS FOR ATTACK.


AGAIN, HE'S GOT MORE FOCUS ON AIM THAN SPEED...

MY TARGET WILL DEPEND ON THE SITUATION AND MY OPPONENT'S STATE OF MIND IF HE'S PLAYING AGGRESSIVELY, I'LL HIT IT DEEP IF HE IS WEAK, I'LL MATCH THAT WITH A SHALLOW SHOT

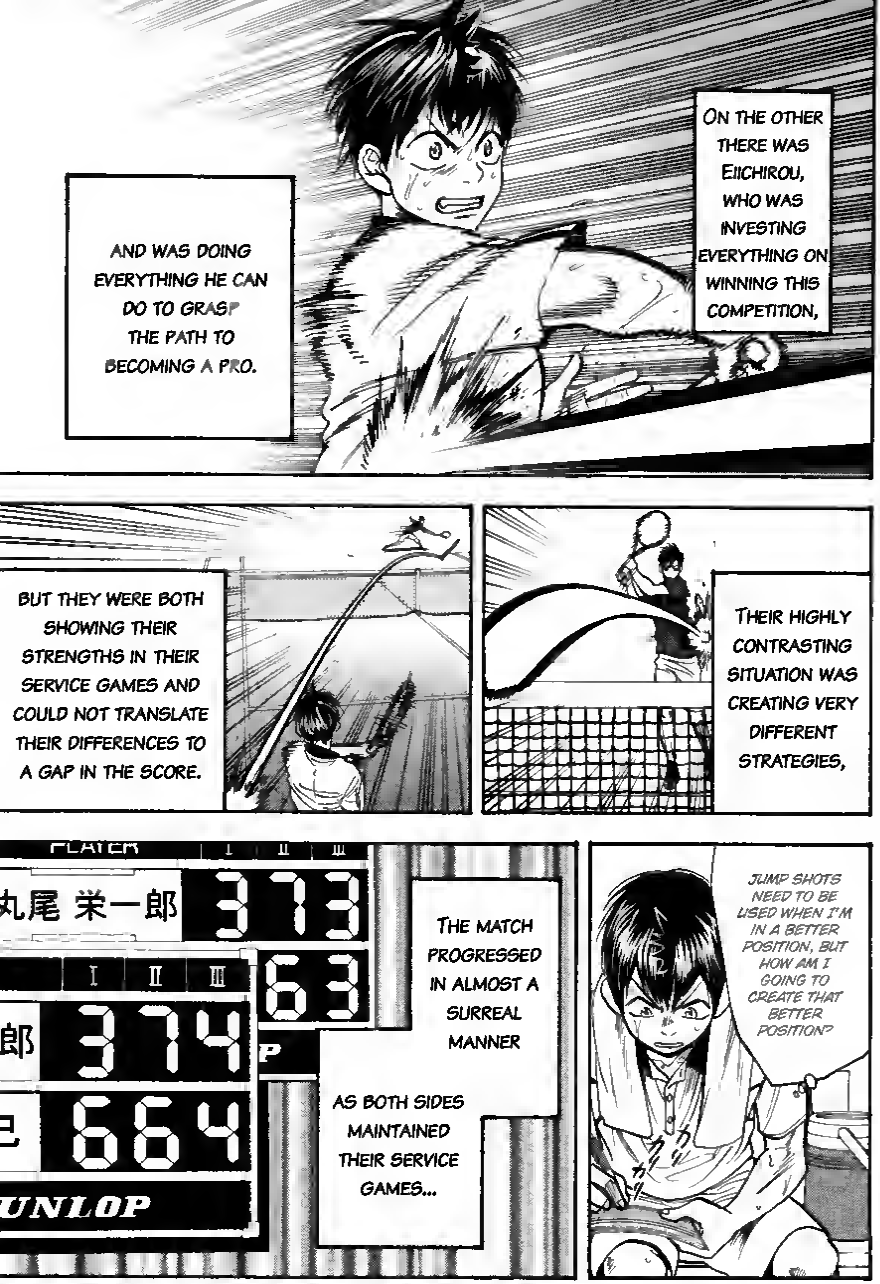
THAT WILL NOT ONLY BEWILDER MY OPPONENT,
BUT IT IS ALSO A SAFE ZONE FOR ME





30 - 0.
CRAP... THAT WAS A BIT OF A STRETCH.
THE SPOTLESS MARUO-KUN MADE A MISTAKE.
IT'S PROOF THAT MY TACTICS ARE WORKING.
HIS STRATEGY CHANGED...
IT SEEMS DEFENSIVE, BUT THERE WAS THAT SHOT BEFORE, TOO...
LOOKS LIKE HE'S TRYING TO MATCH THE WAY I ATTACK.
KE!
KI!!
OUT!
GAME, OGATA. 1 - 1. FINAL SET.
YUP... THIS IS THE BEST STRATEGY AGAINST MARUO-KUN RIGHT NOW...

THE WEAK JUMP SHOTS ARE BEING USED AGAINST ME?!
... AND THIS STYLE ACTUALLY FEELS LIKE A GOOD FIT FOR ME.
ON ONE SIDE OF THE COURT THERE WAS OGATA, THE UNQUESTIONABLE PRODIGY THAT OVERCAME HIS INJURIES AND GAINED BACK THE GLORY OF HIS PAST.
WHO WAS NOW STRETCHING HIS WINGS TO SOAR THROUGH THE WORLD STAGE.


AND WAS DOING EVERYTHING HE CAN DO TO GRASP THE PATH TO BECOMING A PRO.
ON THE OTHER THERE WAS EIICHIROU, WHO WAS INVESTING EVERYTHING ON WINNING THIS COMPETITION,
BUT THEY WERE BOTH SHOWING THEIR STRENGTHS IN THEIR SERVICE GAMES AND COULD NOT TRANSLATE THEIR DIFFERENCES TO A GAP IN THE SCORE.
THEIR HIGHLY CONTRASTING SITUATION WAS CREATING VERY DIFFERENT STRATEGIES,
PLAYER
I II III
丸尾 栄一郎
3 7 3
6 3
郎
3 7 4
6 6 4
UNLOP
THE MATCH PROGRESSED IN ALMOST A SURREAL MANNER
AS BOTH SIDES MAINTAINED THEIR SERVICE GAMES...
JUMP SHOTS NEED TO BE USED WHEN I'M IN A BETTER POSITION, BUT HOW AM I GOING TO CREATE THAT BETTER POSITION?

THE MATCH WILL CONTINUE UNTIL THERE IS A TWO-GAME LEAD.
LAYER I II III
HIROU 376
ARUO
GATA 666
TSUMI
UNTIL THE FINAL SET WENT TO 6 - 6.
IT'S ABOUT TIME I END THIS!

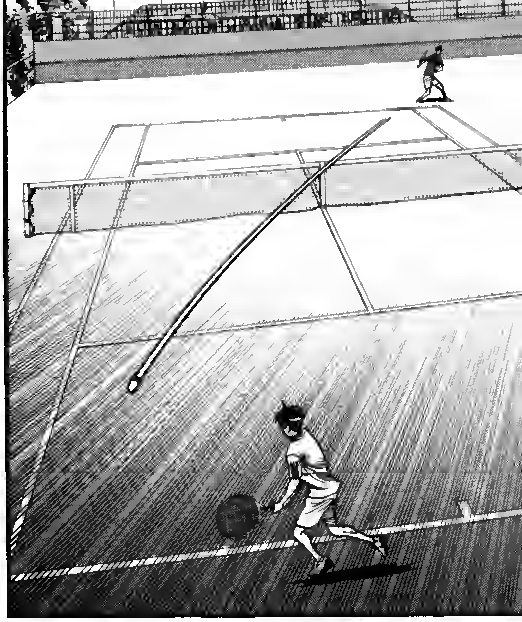
IT'S 6 - 6 ALREADY...
THERE'S NO TIE-BREAKER IN THE FINAL SET,
SO THE MATCH WILL KEEP GOING UNTIL SOMEONE GAINS A TWO GAME LEAD.
Baby Steps
ベイビーステップ
BUT SINCE BOTH PLAYERS PROBABLY DON'T WANT THE GAME TO GO ON FOR TOO LONG,
THEY WILL TRY TO BREAK AS QUICKLY AS POSSIBLE.
I CAN KEEP, BUT I COULDN'T BREAK EVEN ONCE...
IT MEANS I'LL LOSE THE MOMENT I GET BROKEN.
NO... THAT'S THE SAME FOR MY OPPONENT, TOO! I'LL PRETTY MUCH WIN IF I KEEP!
FIRST, I'LL DEFINITELY KEEP!!!

EVEN THOUGH I CAN KEEP MY SERVES, THE REASON I CAN'T BREAK...
IS BECAUSE I'M GETTING TRICKED BY MARUO-KUN'S SERVICE GAMES...
WHERE...
WILL HIS SERVE BE A TOPSPIN? SLICE? FLAT?
HOW FAST? WHERE? WHAT OTHER CHOICES DOES HE HAVE?
HOW WILL HE ATTACK AFTER THAT?
#229 FAR FUTURE

QUICK SERVE?!
15 - 0.
I FORGOT ABOUT THE QUICK SERVE.
THE LEVEL OF PERFECTION EVEN ON A SERVE HE DOESN'T NORMALLY USE... IT'S A CLEAR INDICATION THAT HE WENT THRUOGH INTENSE PRACTICE...
YES!! THE QUICK SERVE STILL WORKS!

I'M SURE I HAVE A GOOD IDEA OF HIS BASIC ABILITIES, BUT THERE ARE SO MANY PATTERNS THAT IT'S HARD TO GRASP THE PACE...
NORMALLY I START TO GET A HOLD OF MY OPPONENT'S PACE TOWARDS THE END
BUT NO MATTER HOW MUCH I PLAY, I CAN'T SHAKE OFF THE DISCOMFORT OF PLAYING AN OPPONENT FOR THE FIRST TIME...
I CAN'T ESTABLISH A FAMILIARITY IF I CAN'T PREDICT IT...
HOW ABOUT NOT FORECASTING AT ALL...?
IF HE IS STRATEGICALLY CONTROLLING ALL THIS... THEN THIS IS TRULY... TRULY AMAZING...

DECIDE AFTER MY OPPONENT HITS...
EVEN IF I AM A BIT SLOW, NOW THAT I KNOW FOR SURE THAT IT'S WIDE...
JUMP IN!!!



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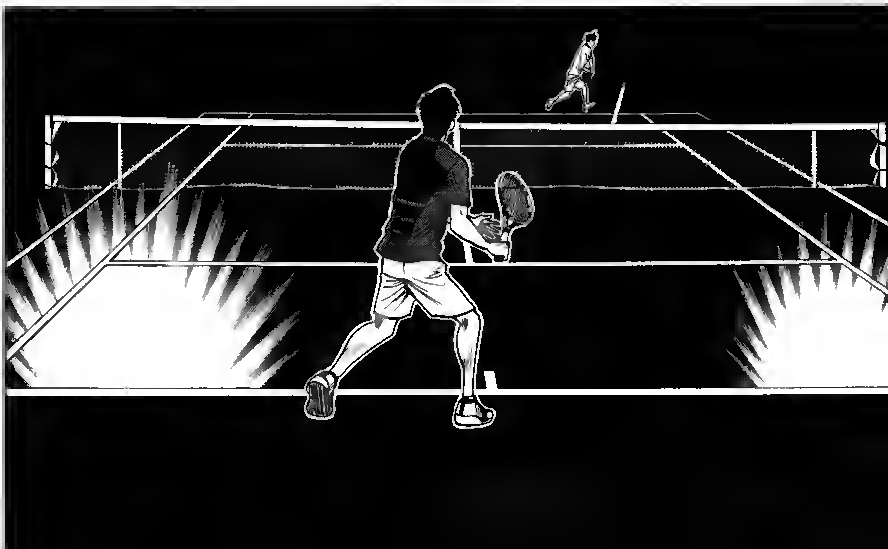


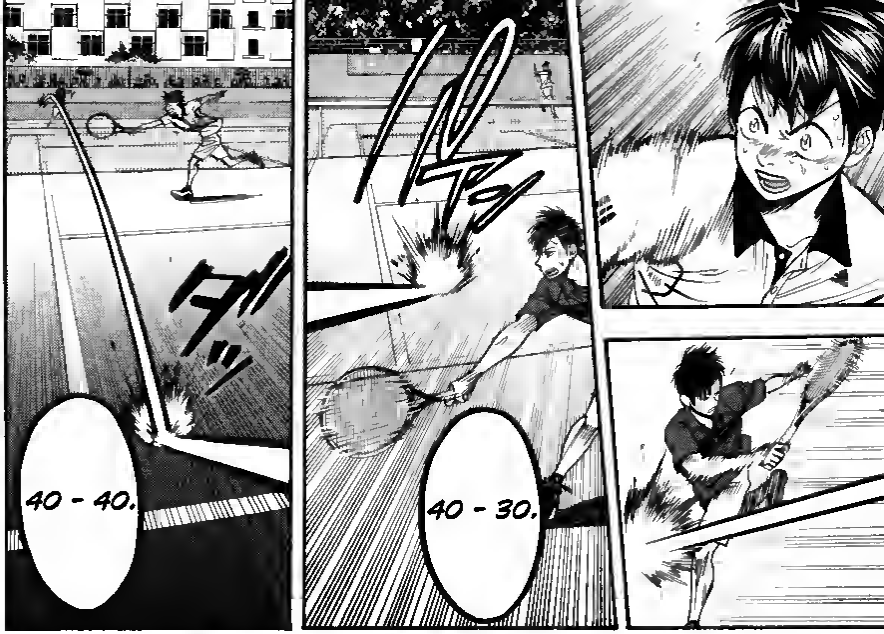
30 - 0.

EMPTY MY MIND AND FOCUS ONLY ON THE BALL IN FRONT OF ME...
NO. I WAS PREDICTING WHETHER IT WOULD BE A CROSS OR DOWN THE LINE AGAIN...
BELIEVE IN MY FOOTWORK...
RUN...
THE MOMENT THE BALL LEAVES THE RACKET...

FULL FORCE!!!
HE'S FAST!
RGH

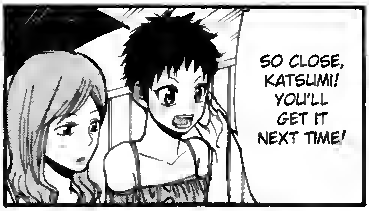
WHAT WAS THAT? DID HIS SHOTS GET STRONGER?
!
30 - 15.
IF HIS MOVEMENTS ARE IMPROVING, THEN I'LL RAISE THE QUALITY OF MY FIRST SERVE.
NOT BAD... EVEN IF THERE'S A HALF-STEP DELAY

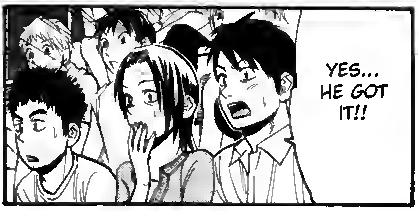
LET ME PLAY AT FULL STRENGTH WITHOUT ANY HESITATION!!
CONCENTRATE ON THE BALL THAT'S ALREADY IN MOTION...
YES!
THIS IS IT!
30 - 30.

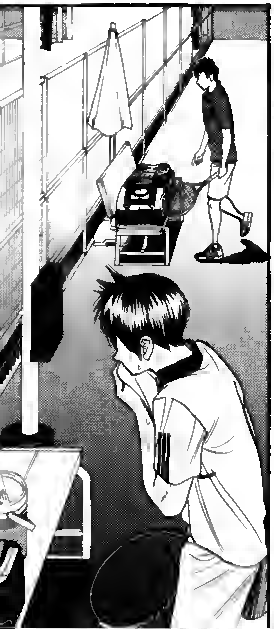

40 - 40.
40 - 30.

ADVAN-
TAGE,
MARUO.

GAME, MARUO. 7 - 6. FINAL SET.
Y- YES!!


SO CLOSE, KATSUMI! YOU'LL GET IT NEXT TIME!


YES... HE GOT IT!!

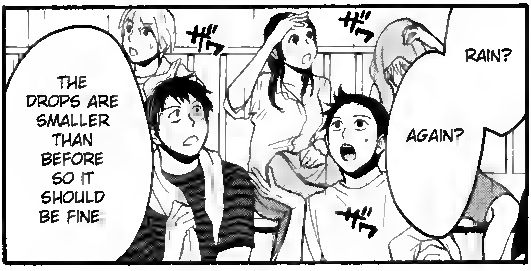


SOMEHOW... SOMEHOW I MANAGED TO KEEP THIS GAME!

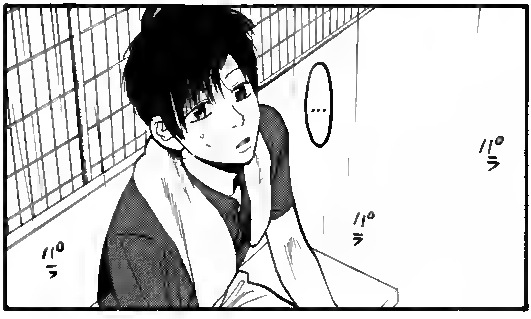
I CAN DO IT NEXT TIME.
I'M GETTING THE HANG OF IT AND MY MISSES ARE DROPPING...
ANYWAY, AGAINST MARUO-KUN IT'S BETTER TO FOCUS JUST ON THE BALL IN FRONT OF ME...
BUT THAT FELT PRETTY GOOD...
EVEN THOUGH THE MATCH IS DECIDED BY THE BALL RIGHT IN FRONT OF MY EYES...
SO I'VE ONLY BEEN LOOKING FAR AHEAD...
I WANTED TO RECOVER QUICKLY AND CATCH UP TO EVERYONE AND IKE-KUN...
FOR RETURN GAMES I'LL USE MY FOOTWORK AND FOCUS ONLY ON THE SHOT IN FRONT OF ME.
FOR MY SERVICE GAMES I'LL ATTACK ONCE MY TACTICS LEAD TO AN ADVANTAGEOUS SITUATION...
THE BALL IN FRONT OF MY EYES IS WHAT'S CONNECTED TO MY VICTORY AND MY GOALS INTO THE FUTURE. IT TOOK ME THIS LONG TO UNDERSTAND THIS...

IF I CAN KEEP THIS ONE... I WILL FINALLY WIN.
THIS IS BAD...
SO FAR IN OGATA-KUN'S SERVICE GAME, I'VE BEEN PUSHED BACK IF I TRIED TO ATTACK AND I WAS EVENTUALLY OVERPOWERED IF I DIDN'T ATTACK.
NEXT IS OGATA-KUN'S SERVE... IT WILL GET REALLY BAD IF I DON'T DO SOMETHING HERE...
HE DEFINITELY GRASPED SOMETHING DURING THE GAME
IT WAS PRETTY HARD TO KEEP...
カキカキ
カキ

No
Date
ISN'T THERE SOMETHING... SOMETHING THAT WILL LET ME BREAK OGATA-KUN?
IF THINGS GO WELL THEN I CAN WIN WITH THE NEXT FOUR POINTS.


RAIN?
AGAIN?
THE DROPS ARE SMALLER THAN BEFORE SO IT SHOULD BE FINE

?!


...

AN UNFAMILIAR RAIN ON TOP OF THIS SITUATION...
THIS PROB- BLY ISN'T ENOUGH FOR ANOTHER INTERRUP- TION...
THIS CAN WORK IN MY FAVOR DEPENDING ON HOW I DEAL WITH IT...
NO, DON'T GET AGITATED LAST TIME THE RAIN ENDED UP WORKING IN MY FAVOR...
prince
TIME!

IF I CAN'T TAKE A GAME THEN I NEED TO CHANGE SOMETHING
YES.
I WILL BEAT HIM BEFORE I GET BEATEN!!

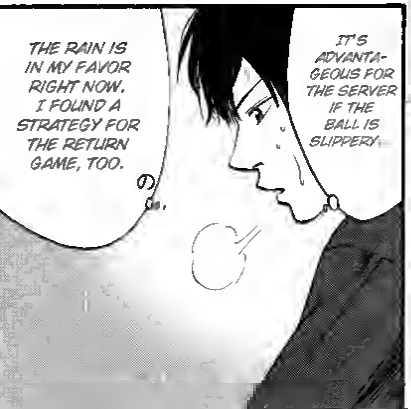
Baby Steps

#230 COURAGE

IF I CAN BREAK THIS SERVE, I WIN...

PLAYER
I
II
III
MARUO EIICHIROU
377
OGATA KATSUMI
666
DUNLOP

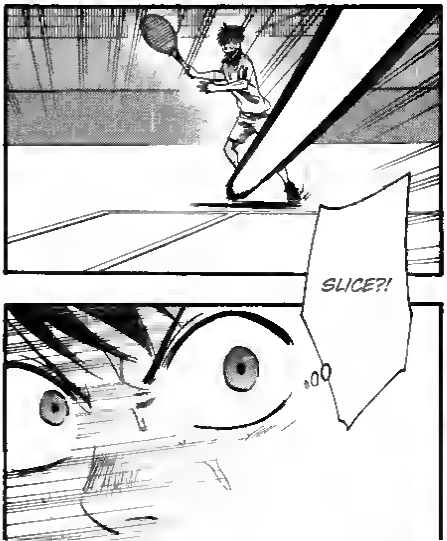
IT'S NOT HEAVY ENOUGH TO STOP THE MATCH... I NEED TO FOCUS


THE RAIN IS IN MY FAVOR RIGHT NOW. I FOUND A STRATEGY FOR THE RETURN GAME, TOO.
IT'S ADVANTAGEOUS FOR THE SERVER IF THE BALL IS SLIPPERY.

SINCE OGATA-KUN GRASPED SOMETHING AT THE LAST RETURN GAME, I NEED TO END IT HERE IF I DON'T WANT TO GIVE HIM A CHANCE.

IN ORDER TO FINISH THIS ON THE NEXT ONE... I WILL PLAY SAFE TO DEFINITELY KEEP THIS GAME

MAKE GOOD USE OF THE RAIN AND...
HEAD


SLICE?!

IT'LL SLIP, SO ONE STEP FASTER!
BEFORE THE INTERRUPTION, OGATA-KUN SAID HE IS AFRAID OF GETTING HURT...
GAH

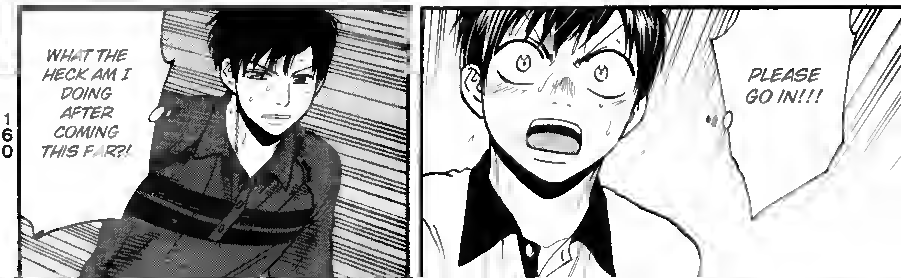
FOR SHOTS THAT I'M NOT SURE OF, JUST HIT IT DEEP INTO THE OPEN COURT!
I'LL USE ANYTHING I CAN!
USE FLATS AND SLICES THAT SLIP EASILY TO MAKE HIM KEEP USING THE LEG HE IS AFRAID OF GETTING INJURED...

日本ジュニアテニス大会
タタタ
キュッ
キュッ
！
バシン
ラケット

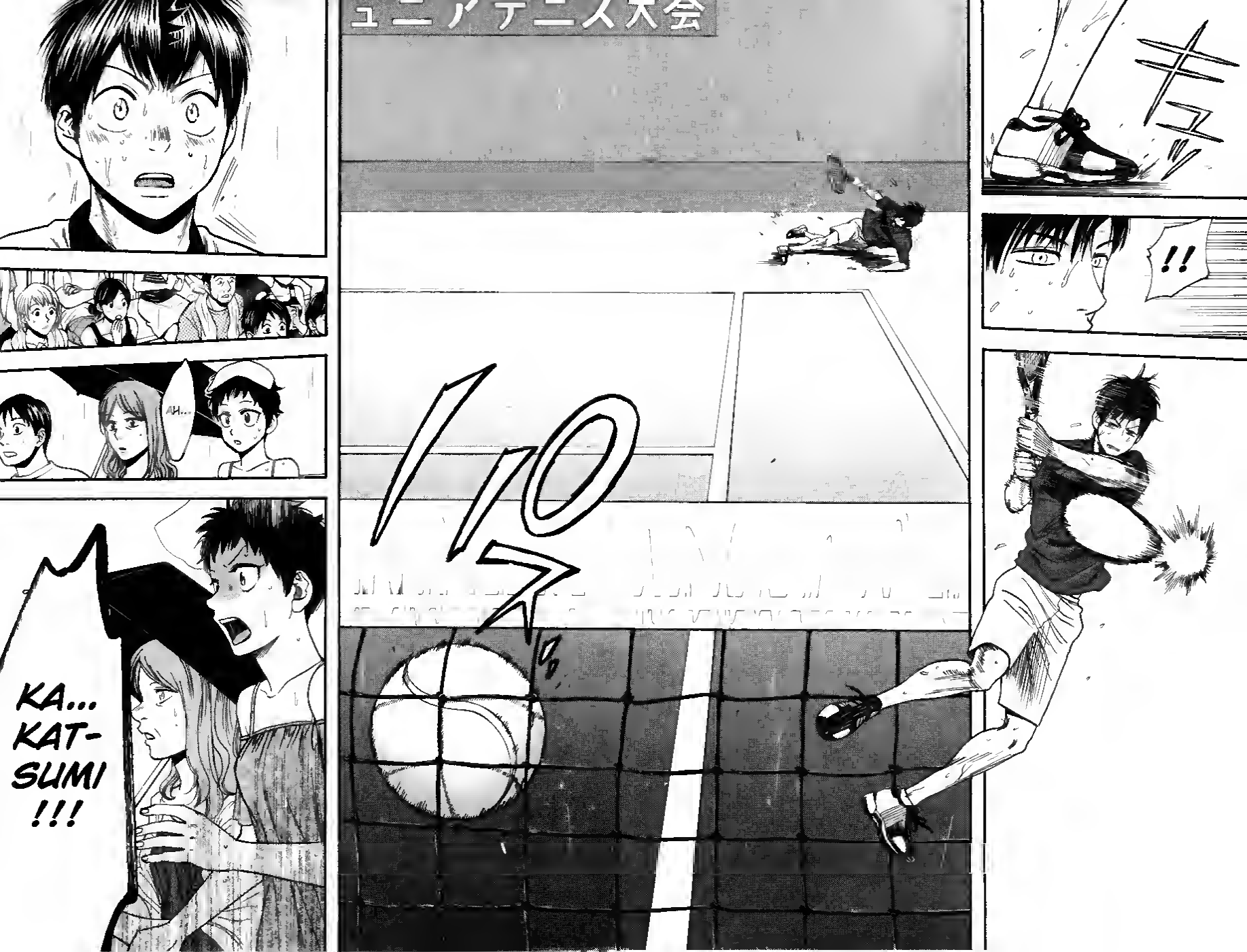
GET A HOLD OF YOURSELF... REMEMBER WHY YOU WAITED UNTIL YOU WERE COMPLETELY HEALED TO COME BACK...
IT WASN'T LIKE MY FOOT SLIPPED, BUT I GOT DISTRACTED BY THE NOISE CREATED FROM THE FRICTION WITH THE WET SURFACE...
キュッ
キュッ
?!
0 - 15.
SHOOT.
IS IT REALLY SOMETHING THAT WILL GET WORSE FROM TRIPPING?
I GUESS HIS INJURIES AREN'T COMPLETELY HEALED YET.
IS HE REALLY CONCERNED ABOUT HIS FOOTING?
THAT WAS A SIMPLE MISS THAT WAS RARELY SEEN UNTIL NOW.
I DON'T HAVE ROOM TO PICK THE METHOD I USE TO WIN!!
WAIT, WHY AM I WORRIED ABOUT SOMETHING LIKE THAT?
ぎゅっ

RGH
!
IF IT'S GOING WELL THEN I WON'T CHANGE THE STRATEGY!
?!
THERE'S NO DOUBT... OGATA-KUN ISN'T HITTING THE WAY HE WANTS...

GO!!!
IF THAT'S THE CASE... RATHER THAN MAKING HIM RUN...
AH
MY TIMING WAS A BIT OFF BECAUSE THE BALL SLIPPED A BIT...


WHAT THE HECK AM I DOING AFTER COMING THIS FAR?!
PLEASE GO IN!!!

HE'S FAST!
IS HE BACK TO HIMSELF?
I'LL RETURN THIS, NO MATTER WHAT!!
F'''
A TWO-HANDED BACKHAND. HE'S GOING FOR A ONE-SHOT FINISH!?
LEFT OR RIGHT... WHICH SIDE?!


ュニアテニス大会
AH...
KA... KAT-SUMI !!!
!!

O-
OGATA-SAN...
ARE YOU OKAY?
...
HAHAHA...
I'M
TOTALLY
FINE!

DID YOU SLIP BECAUSE OF THE RAIN?
NO, I JUST LOST MY BALANCE BECAUSE OF THE MOMENTUM.
ホッ
0 - 30.
YIKES, THAT WAS SCARY... FOR A MOMENT, I THOUGHT IT WAS THE END OF MY TENNIS CAREER
BUT I WAS TOTALLY FINE...
SO STUPID. WHY AM I SUCH A FOOL?
I'LL JUST DO WHATEVER IS NEEDED TO BE DONE
I'M NOT THE ONE WHO DECIDES THE OUTCOME
MY FEAR KEEPS GETTING IN THE WAY OF MY FAITH...
IF I KEEP DOING WHAT I NEED TO DO, THEN THERE'S NO REASON FOR ME TO FEAR

WHEN I BECOME A PRO, I CAN'T WIN IF I GET AFRAID OF GETTING INJURED WHENEVER IT RAINS.
TENNIS DOESN'T SEEK SOMEONE WHO PLAYS LIKE THAT.
IF I'M BEING SOUGHT BY TENNIS RIGHT NOW...
THEN THERE'S NO WAY I'LL GET HURT HERE...
..
I'M GLAD THAT HE'S OKAY, BUT...
IF OGATA-KUN DIDN'T LOSE HIS BALANCE, THAT BALL WOULD'VE MOST LIKELY ESCAPED MY REACH.
WOULDN'T IT BE COUNTER-PRODUCTIVE IF I KEEP MAKING OGATA-KUN USE HIS LEGS LIKE THAT?
I HAVE A TWO-POINT LEAD. LET'S MAKE SURE I GET THIS.
ﾄｯ

SINCE THE BALL SLIPS FROM THE RAIN, I NEED TO PREPARE FASTER
I KNEW IT HIS MOVEMENTS HAVE GOTTEN BETTER...

MAKE OGATA-KUN RUN TO THE OPEN COURT WITH A FLAT-LIKE SHOT...

40
15 - 30.
RGH
YES!
YUP! THIS IS WHAT YOU CALL FULL POWER!
THE INJURY MUST HAVE BEEN MAKING ME SUBCONSCIOUSLY HOLDING BACK.

ジュニアテニス
HE DIDN'T JUST RESET HIS MIND... HE'S ACTIVELY ATTACKING WITHOUT HESITATION.
YOU CAN FEEL A LOT OF PASSION ON THE BALL THAT YOU COULDN'T SEE BEFORE
THERE'S NO QUESTION... SOMETHING CHANGED FROM THAT MOMENT.
DO PEOPLE NORMALLY MOVE LIKE THAT AFTER SUCH A BIG FALL...?
THIS IS PROBABLY IT
IT'S MY ONE AND ONLY CHANCE...
IF I CAN SOMEHOW STEAL TWO MORE POINTS, I WIN
WAIT, 15 - 30... I AM LEADING ON MY RETURN GAME.
I WILL BET EVERY-THING HERE!
FIFTEEN SECONDS.

#231 COMPLETE DEVOTION

I'LL TAKE THIS AND WIN NO MATTER WHAT!!!

I KNOW...

YOUR INSTINCTS ARE RIGHT ABOUT NEEDING TO DECIDE THE MATCH HERE, MARUO-KUN
I'D THINK THE SAME THING

THAT'S WHY I WON'T BE INTIMIDATED OR AFRAID..
I WILL MAKE USE OF MY ABSOLUTE PHYSICAL ADVANTAGE AND SECURE THE VICTORY.
RIGHT NOW, I'VE TRULY BEEN RELEASED FROM MY INJURIES..
AND HAVE SHOWN MY GREATEST PLAY.
BUT MARUO-KUN KEEPS SURPASSING MY EXPECTATIONS...
IT'S TO THE CENTER!

RGH
PLEASE GO A BIT DEEP...
IF I CAN GAIN EVEN A LITTLE BIT OF WIGGLE ROOM
EVEN JUST A LITTLE BIT IS FINE
ARGH

SINCE MY MOTION WILL BE BIG, REACT QUICKLY!!!
SLOW THE PACE DOWN, BUT DON'T RUSH... HOLD ON TO MY OWN PACE...
ドン

A TOPSPIN CROSS!
NICE SHOT, BUT THIS IS MY ONLY CHANCE!
MAXIMUM PRIORITY ON POWER!
GO!!

YES!
I DID IT!!!

WHAT?!
HUH?!
O-OUT.
30 ALL.
T- THAT WAS DEFINITELY IN... THAT WAS...
NO WAY ..
ISN'T IT SUPPOSED TO BE IN IF IT'S ON THE LINE?
WHAAAAT?! IT WOULD'VE BEEN DOUBLE MATCH-POINT IF IT WAS IN...
AH... NO, I'M SORRY
THOSE AREN'T EXPECTED TO GO IN ALL THE TIME!
ANYWAY, THAT SHOT WAS A LONG STRETCH!
NO, NO, NO... THERE'S NO POINT FUSSING OVER IT NOW.
STOP THINKING ABOUT IT!!
A WRONG CALL CAN HAPPEN AT ANY TIME...

AND HOW FAR I CAN BELIEVE IN MY TENNIS...
FROM HERE ON OUT... IT'S ALL ABOUT HOW OGATA-KUN WILL ATTACK...
WHAT A SHOT AT THIS MOMENT, EVEN IF IT WAS BARELY IN...
I NEED TO BE CAREFUL ABOUT THOSE ALL-OR-NOTHING ATTACKS...
I WAS SAVED BY THE UMPIRE, BUT THAT WAS TOO HIGH OF A RISK
MY BODY IS MOVING WELL...
ALWAYS STAY ALERT AND USE AGGRESSIVE TACTICS TO SECURE THE GAME!!!

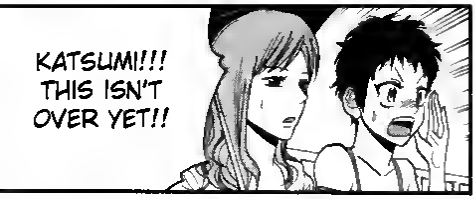
GO FOR A FINISH!
IF I BREAK HIS GUARD WITH MY SERVE...
OGATA IS CLOSING IN!
MARUO.. HOW WILL YOU GET OUT OF THIS SITUATION!?
QUICK REACTION!

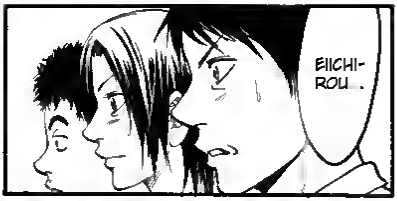
COME, BRING IT ON!!
HIS BODY DROPPED... IT'S GOING TO COME AGAIN!!!
ぎゃん

30 - 40.
YEAH!!

おお
おお
WHOA!!! MARUO GOT THE FIRST MATCH POINT!!!
I WON WITH MY REGULAR CHANGE-OF-PACE!
HE GOT ME...
PULLING THIS OFF RIGHT AFTER THAT MISSED CALL...
YOU ARE REALLY QUITE SOMETHING, KIDDO...
EVEN IF IT DIDN'T SUCCEED, IT BECAME A CHECK TO MAKE HIM THINK I HAVE THE FIREPOWER!
THANKS TO THAT, MY CHANGE-OF-PACE THAT GOT HAMMERED BADLY IN THE FIRST HALF HAS COME BACK TO LIFE!
IT'S ALL THANKS TO MY FULL-POWER JUMP SHOT!! IT SLOWED DOWN OGATA-KUN'S REACTION
BECASE HE WAS PREOCCUPIED WITH THAT!

MARUO TOOK THE LEAD IN THE FINAL MOMENTS OF THE MATCH!!
OGATA!!! WE'RE ALL HERE TO WATCH YOUR REVIVAL!!!
MARUO!! YOU NEED TO FINISH THIS HERE!!
35~47


KATSUMI!!! THIS ISN'T OVER YET!!


EIICHI-ROU...

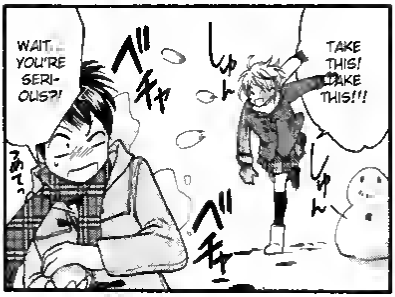
STC

I WILL CRUSH HIM RIGHT AWAY
I SHOULDN'T GET TOO CONCERNED BY AN ALL-OR-NOTHING SHOT..
I AM PLAYING AT MY BEST PERFORMANCE RIGHT NOW... I WON'T TAKE MY TIME ANYMORE
THIS IS THE END!!!

Baby Steps

Baby Steps 24 Extra

⇒ WHEN THERE'S SNOW ⇐



Date

Hello, this is Katsuki.

When Ogata's match started it was summer, but it's already winter~ What's going on? Anyway, thanks to your support, this manga has passed the five-year milestone! Thank you so much!!!

To my joy, I think I hear more people saying "I am reading Baby Steps!" when I go on interviews (I hope this is actually true!)

I can continue drawing thanks to all the readers. I want to try my best to make the story more fun.

Then I'll see you next volume.